

# Training Tails

**By: Stainless Steel Fox**

Tails in Sonic Sat AM is woefully underused, mainly as kidnap bait and a cheering section. But what if he had a chance to improve himself? When he gets sent to another dimension by Robotnik's dimensional portal ray, he gets that chance. BadassBookworm!Tails. Crossover with Dragon Ball. Chapters 29-31 up! There will be two sequel stories Traveller Tails, and Lylat Tails.

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# Origin Tails

**Author Notes:** I know everyone's waiting on Cerinia Chronicles, but I suffered severe writers block, followed by an exploding laptop, insane levels of busy as I rebuilt my bedroom and bathroom, and no longer accepting updates from my year 2000, Windows 98 OS desktop. I will get it done, but first I need to address another piece of detritus that's clogging my mental channels.

The well known Mr McCloud is not the only hard luck fox that's come to my attention. Miles 'Tails' Prower, is a great character who's depressingly underused, especially in Sonic SatAM. I intend to rectify that. With Sailor Moon it was a trip to the DBZ universe (fanfiction(dot)net/s/184889/1/A\_Special\_Training), and with Shinji Ikari, it was finding some Warhammer 40K miniatures, and growing a spine (fanfiction(dot)net/s/3886999/1/Shinji\_and\_Warhammer40k). They each found their awesome, and cranked it to 11.

With Tails, he needs a place where they'll be willing and able to bring out the 'hidden power' he was supposed to show in season 3, and I know of a place they can crank his awesome all the way up to 'over 9000' (If you didn't read the blurb, this is a clue). As a potentially expert pilot and techie, he might also benefit from knowing how to 'Do a Barrel Roll' (Once again, a subtle hint as to where he'll travel.)

Enough wittering, on with the show.

## Chapter 1 - Origin Tails

Miles 'Tails' Prower was making his way through the Great Forest, away from Knothole, and in the general direction of Robotropolis. The nine year old fox wasn't crazy, he didn't intend to try and enter Robotnik's capital city, but he hoped to prove something.

He was nine now, and Aunt Sally still wouldn't let him be a part of the Freedom Fighter missions. He did what he could to help picking

vegetables, cooking and helping the others back at Knothole, but he wanted to do more. Aunt Sally, Bunny, Rotor and of course his big brother, Sonic, were always going out, facing down Robotnik and his robotic goons, risking themselves to protect everyone.

The kit felt as if he was letting them down by not being there to help, even though the thought of actually going on a mission scared him as much as it excited him. He knew he wasn't as brave and fast as Sonic, or as smart as Aunt Sally, or strong as Bunny, or as technically skilled as Rotor, but he was working hard to get better, and wanted to show them he could do more to help, even if he couldn't be there alongside them.

He was getting better at building stuff, and he carried the device that was the reason for his trip, a new design of electro-binoculars he'd built in Rotor's workshop, out of salvaged Swat-bot and Spy-bot optical components, but this one had a laser range finder attached and connected to some audio, modulator and memory components from Swat-bot speech circuits. It looked like a pair of goggles with a lightweight boom microphone attached.

He'd created a device that not only gave you an exact range on what you were viewing, but which could pick up the vibrations of any reflective surface due to speech, and repeat it in the headset, or onto a memory chip. It could also record what you were viewing at the time alongside the sound track. The mike allowed you to annotate the record. However, he didn't feel right testing it by spying on his friends.

He intended to search around until he spotted a Swat-bot patrol or something, and spy on them with the electro-binocs at long range. He'd hear their hover-motors long before they could spot him, and the entire forest was made of hiding holes, so it was about as safe as he could make things. Pity it wasn't a nicer day, it had been overcast and muggy since daybreak, and the clouds were looking threatening.

There might well be a storm in the near future, even a thunderstorm. Tails shivered, then told himself to stop it. A freedom fighter shouldn't be afraid of a little lightning or thunder... He could hear something now... he stopped, listened and then frowned. That was the sound of hover-motors, but it wasn't a Swat-bot patrol craft. It was bigger... much bigger.

He scooted up the nearest tree, and looked out from a vantage point among the branches. It was big, it was bad, and it was at least 250 metres above him. He quickly put his binoculars to good use, zooming in. The vessel was a big red disk, at least a hundred metres across, like two Frisbees edge to edge. A big red ball with multiple engines and fins sticking out of it was built into one edge, the back of the craft, presumably the main power core. The underside was studded with laser turrets, a larger glass dome forwards that was presumably the bridge. The upper surface, by comparison, seemed flat. He quickly switched in image recording.

Dead centre on the underside was a massive, downwards facing spire, surrounded by external super-capacitors, and with a muzzle arrangement that Tails assumed could only be some powerful weapon. This was quickly confirmed when a spear of purple energy shot down into the forest, engulfing an area about 50 metres across in a purple swirling vortex. After a few seconds the vortex disappeared, and so did the forest, leaving nothing but a clean edged circular crater.

He moved his viewpoint forward to the bridge he'd spotted earlier, zoomed in, and crossed his tails as he cut in his audio-snooper. He could clearly see two control positions, manned by Swat-bots, and further back... a third figure, but it took several seconds to figure out it was Sniveley. Robotnik's oozing voice came in clearly, with the slight hum of the vessels own vibrations.

"... elent Snively! And that was only at 1 percent power! The dimensional vortex generator is truly ready for action. Now you have only to wait for the vortex modulation crystals to recycle, then you can move to the centre of that blasted forest, and remove it, and

those wretched Freedom Fighters from my universe once and for all!"

Snively's voice matched his name. "As you command sire, or course, but if you are willing to destroy such a large area, why not simply use a bomb, or a kinetic orbital strike? Those would have been much easier to fabricate. You only ever managed to create the one vortex generator."

Robotnik's voice took on a contemptuous tone, or rather, a more contemptuous tone than usual. "That Snively, is why you are the lackey, and I am the ruler of all I survey. It is not enough just to erase those animals, especially that pestiferous hedgehog; I want them to \_know\_ they've failed.

"The exit point is random, so most likely the entire area will reappear at some point in interstellar space. The Freedom Fighters will have just enough time to realise that they and their precious Knothole are dead before their atmosphere explodes away and they all strangle and freeze in the darkness between the stars.

"And removing the Great Forest will allow my easy access to strip mine the rich resources that lie beneath it. Bombing would mean a more complex mining operation from underneath. So I kill two birds, and one hedgehog with one stone. Ohhh, it warms the cockles of my mechanical heart just to think of it." The dictator gave a mechanical chuckle.

"But sir what if they land somewhere hospitable?" Snively enquired.

"Even better. Even I could not retrieve them, and they will have no way of duplicating my machine, let alone finding which universe to return to. They will live out their pitiful little lives in the knowledge that I, Ivor Robotnik rule all of Mobius, now and forever!" The cybernetic dictator's voice rose to a triumphant yell.

Tails could clearly hear Snively mutter. "Not for too long, you overinflated buffoon!"

Robotnik's voice came back sharply. "What was that Snively?"

Snively's voice immediately cranked up to its maximum servility level. "I was just saying doctor, how your brilliance overwhelms me like a typhoon!"

Robotnik preened. "Yes... yes, I can understand that it would. Proceed with all speed, Snively!"

Tails was already heading back down the tree, close to panic. His first impulse was to race back to Knothole as fast as his tails could carry him, and lay the problem in front of Sonic and Aunt Sally. They would know what to do. However, he didn't know how soon those 'vortex modulation crystals' would recycle, and he didn't know how fast the machine was. He might get there just in time to see it launch its attack.

He had to warn Knothole, yes, but he didn't have time to go himself. More than that, he had to do something to stop the machine himself. Aunt Sally would probably be real mad at him risking himself, but he couldn't see a choice. But how...

He was close to Weapons Cache 3, which had explosives raided from Robotnik's mining operations, and radio-detonators he'd built under Rotor's direction. It also had a bunch of fireworks, which were specifically there for signalling and distractions. The caches were distributed and well away from Knothole so an accident wouldn't hurt anyone, or give their location away. He knew the location of the cache because he'd helped Rotor bring stuff out here, as well as how to open the door. It was impossible to find otherwise.

So he had tools to work with, but how to use them. What would Sonic do... dash straight in, evade the mass of turret fire, set the bombs and be out of there before Snively knew what was happening... No, even Sonic would have trouble getting up that high, and Dulcie or the Freedom Stormer would be too big a target for those lasers, at least on the way up. For that matter, so would he, fast as he could fly, unless...



He had a plan. Aunt Sally would surely reject it out of paw. It wasn't a good one, it was risky, there was no contingency, no room for error, but it just might work. He pressed the concealed knot that opened the camouflaged door, and set to work, setting the electro-binocs to voice record for the others in case it \_didn't\_ work.

Snively nodded approvingly. The crystals were stable, and the system was ready to use.

"Move to the geographical centre of the Great Forest, and fire, full power!" He commanded the robots operating the actual control consoles. He himself was sitting on a raised captain's chair that had a definite throne like quality.

"Setting course co-ordinates..." intoned the Swat-bot at the helm. "Readying charging cycle..." stated the one beside him at the tactical console.

Suddenly, off to one side a number of streams of light flew up towards the crimson behemoth. Snively's head jerked round. "We're under attack? Evasive manoeuvres!"

The tactical Swat-bot responded. "Unnecessary. Analysis indicates non-collision course, and black powder of insufficient quantities to harm this vessel. Probable usage is as signalling device." The fireworks confirmed this by popping with big bright flares.

"Grrr!" Snively had just been made to look foolish, and he couldn't abide that. "Target all secondary turrets on that location! Destroy the launcher, and anyone operating it!" A second wave of fireworks lit off just as a fusillade of laser fire obliterated their origin point.

Tails was already on the move. Even as he'd watched the turrets swing, he'd adjusted the satchel he now carried, and was scooting further up the tree on the opposite side to the fireworks, propelled by his spinning tails. He'd left the electro-binocs behind, both as a record for the others, and because he already had enough to carry.

"Let's do it to it!" He muttered as he burst from the crown of the tree, shooting up into the air and arcing up above the vessel before it's turrets could track back from the decoy. The delay fuse on the fireworks had worked even better than he'd dreamed. He only hoped the dead man fuses on the explosives he carried would work as well.

Snively was alerted to the new problem by a flashing light, and pulled up an exterior view on his monitor. "It was a trick! It's that foetid little flying fox that hangs around with Sonic! Destroy him, before I have you all recycled into can openers!"

The Swat-bots carefully avoided mentioning that it was Snively himself who'd been fooled into uncovering a section of the defense perimeter. They might be mindless android combat machines, but they weren't stupid. The turrets turned at their maximum travel, but Tails was already above the rim of the disk, dropping down on the upper surface.

The wide domed disk of riveted red painted metal was free of weapons systems, but not undefended. A hatch opened near the centre, and three Swat-bots emerged on an elevator platform. They immediately swung to cover the fox. For a fraction of a second, Tails was utterly terrified. He knew what the three laser blasters on their forearms could do to a mere flesh and blood fox.

Then he reminded himself that Sonic wouldn't even blink at three to one odds and dropped to the metal, winding up his tails as the blaster bolts blazed through where his head had been a second ago. Lucky he'd dismantled enough of the robots for parts that he knew their reaction times and targeting protocols.

He shot forward, propelled by his tails, straight between their legs, flicking his tails wide as he passed. As he'd hoped snagging them caused the front two Swat-bots to spin wildly around, and their follow up shots blew each other's heads off. But the third was swinging round to target him, and he ducked over the edge just ahead of another blaster bolt that singed his tail tips. He threw a peanut butter

sandwich out behind him that he'd brought as lunch and been too nervous to eat.

It would have gratified him to note his trap worked, as the running Swat-bot stepped on the sandwich and slid, arms flailing off the edge of the vehicle, but by that time he had other things to worry about. As he dropped below the edge, he found himself face to face with one of the laser turrets, but fortunately not the muzzle, which was facing the other way, still covering the side he'd come up by.

It started to swing, and he had a crazy idea, grabbing a maintenance handhold on the opposite side to the barrels with one gloved paw, and let the turret swing him around with it. As he reached the right point, he let go, and was flung inwards along a tangent towards the central pillar, boosting with his tails.

There was a sudden crash, and he thought the turrets had hit him for a fraction of a second, but the lack of him disintegrating into wisps of plasma that should have followed indicated they hadn't. Instead it was the storm, which had stopped threatening, and started happening, the wind whipping the treetops around, and thunder crackling in the sky above.

Tails crossed the distance to the central spire in less than a second, and arrested his forward motion just in time to avoid slamming into it. He dropped in between the pillars of two flux capacitors and grabbed onto a maintenance ladder. He was close enough that he could feel the electric charge they were building up attracting his fur. He shivered again. If he'd hit one of them by mistake, the energy discharge would have vaporised him.

He shook himself, he had a job to do, and it looked like his gamble, or 'idiotic scheme' as Sally would probably call it, had come off. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw the turrets were trained dead on him, but not firing. He'd thought they would be programmed not to fire into the ship's own structure, which meant as long as he stuck to climbing around, they wouldn't shoot.

Of course, that meant getting away before he set off the charges rather a problem, but in this he'd decided to emulate Sonic. Full speed ahead and take advantage of whatever he could. He climbed up to a junction point and reached into his satchel, bringing out the first charge. He set it in place, and switched in the arming circuit. It lit up and he breathed a sigh of relief.

The detonators were normally designed to explode on a signal from a control box. He'd jiggered them so they'd start looking for a signal as soon as they were turned on, and blow when it stopped. It had just been a matter of rewiring a logic level, a task of a few seconds. The signal was now being put out by the control box in a pocket of the satchel. If it was switched off, or destroyed all the armed bombs would go at once.

He clambered up and around, setting similar charges at each junction box. As he edged past a particularly intestinal piece of external plumbing his feet slipped, and he was seconds away from falling onto a charged capacitor, or falling into the fire zone of the turrets, but a combination of tail-work and hauling himself up set him back on firm footing.

A clank made him look over his shoulder, and he saw a hatch open on the underside. A Swat-bot lowered itself out, and brought its feet up to the hull, where they clunked into place. Magnetic clamps. It hung upside down and slowly turned itself to face him, bringing up its laser arm. But it had the same problem as the turrets, and Tails gave a small sigh of relief.

Then it started stepping forward, as slowly, but as inexorably as a mutant monster from one of the scary stories Bunny told him. Lightning cracked right next to the ship and speared a tree below, setting it aflame. Normally, this would have terrified the young fox, but all his terror was currently in use. He was frozen to the spot, tightly gripping the ridge that supported him as the robot clomped closer.

There was no way to dislodge it, and if he came within arms reach, it could crush him like a ripe tomato. But if he backed off, there were no anti-tamper circuits on the charges, so it could just pluck them off, render the whole plan useless. And it was such a good one, the charges would not only discharge the capacitors in an explosion that would utterly vaporise the dimensional generator, the energy backlash into the ship's main reactor would cause it to explode a few seconds later.

If he stayed, the robot or the explosion would get him. If he flew away, the turrets would get him. At this time Sonic would usually come up with some crazy-wonderful plan that would solve everything, but he wasn't Sonic, never would be. At least Sonic and the others would be saved whatever happened. Enough charges were in place to wreck the machine, even though he hadn't planted the last couple.

He focussed on that thought, and suddenly, he wasn't scared any-more, or rather the fear didn't affect him any-more. His face suddenly split in a big grin. This must be what Sonic felt like \_all\_ the time. He thought of his big brother giving him a thumbs up as they raced side by side through a sunny vale, Sally giving him the funny kiss, Bunny sitting by his bedside and reading him a story in her scariest voice, Rotor nodding approvingly as he correctly wired up a triple reflex oscillator...

'If I'm going out, I'm taking this hunk of junk with me!' His friends would be safe, and that was more important than what happened to him. He watched the approaching robot, eager for it to reach him, and amazed at how easy things suddenly were when you weren't bothered by survival. He wasn't exactly happy, but the feeling of fatalism locked away the fear he felt, allowing him to act despite the fact that his remaining life-span was probably less than the time it took Sonic to scarf down a chilli-dog.

He just wished he didn't have to hold on with both hands and feet to avoid falling. He would have loved to emulate Sonic by folding his arms and standing there tapping his foot, just like his hero had so

many times. At least he could do the voice. He put on his best Sonic smirk, and called out in a superbly sarcastic Sonic simulation.

"C'mon, bot-brain, I'm waiting... Before the rain comes and rusts you solid..."

His gloved hand reached down to the pocket where the control box lay, and he gave one last glance at the Great Forest, his home. Another lightning flash illuminated it, and the towers of the capacitors below...

Then he had an idea. It had the virtue of making his previous plan look sane and sensible, requiring timing beyond the limits of vulpine reaction, and having almost no chance of working... but he just might survive, and the ship would go up whether it worked or not. He was sure Sonic would have approved.

Tails lowered himself carefully and planted the remaining charges between the two capacitor housings, his paw centimetres away from the danger zone. He armed them, then paused as he looked up at the robot that was now almost upon him. If it stretched, it could just reach the charges, and him. He twisted up his tails till they hurt, ready for one insane burst of speed. As it got within arms reach, he said to himself. "When faced with disaster, just go a little faster!"

It grabbed for him, and he jumped forward, threading his way between it's arms and grabbing the back of it's helmet as he flew over or rather under the inverted android. He swung round behind it with all the turning power of his tails, and slammed into it, kicking off in the same movement. It swayed forward, and it's flailing arms brushed the capacitors.

Tails felt his fur stand straight out from the discharge, even though he was no longer in contact with the robot, but most of the current had passed straight through the machine, utterly frying it's electronics. The magnetic clamps were no longer gripping the hull, and the robot started to fall away. Tails dived under it, grabbing the

back plate with his gloves and almost scorching his paws on the flash warmed metal.

He was watching one of the turrets out of the corner of his eye, and suddenly saw it start to track down... Now! He ducked under the shadow of the Swat-bot and kicked off straight down in a power dive, a fraction of a second before the robot evaporated in the flare of a dozen laser pulses. He was still too close, but he couldn't wait any longer. His paw into the satchel pocket and flipped the trigger on the control box.

The follow-up laser pulses rained around him, but all missed, since the turrets' platform was racked by a massive explosion. Tails was falling; or rather flying down head first so looking down past his feet he could see the dimensional cannon blow itself apart. The very tip fell free of the explosion, a purple glow forming around it, but compared to even the previous pulse it was feeble, a fraction of 1 percent. The Great Forest might lose a couple of trees, but that was all.

He glanced down at the target area as the shock wave hit him, but the worse of it was deflected by the wake from his frantically spinning tails, something he hadn't realised would happen, but was very grateful for. It still shook him, but he saw a flash of blue... oh no! Sonic, Sally... They'd come in response to his signal, and emerged from the undergrowth just where the dimensional beam would hit

"Sonic, get everyone away! Warp 7!" They were looking up, but not moving, so there was only one thing for it. He dived to the side, into the path of the beam, just as the flash of purple energy discharged. He was no more than a dozen metres from the ground, and he saw Sonic wind up for a dash to come get him.

He moved up, into the oncoming beam, and the vortex wrapped around him. Through a gap in the closing vortex he just glimpsed the big red hover ship explode in a massive fireball that consumed the remains of the falling machine. He also saw the trail of some sort of

escape pod flying away, indicating Snively had found time to save his own worthless hide. Then the darkness claimed him.

Sonic shot through the space that had contained a red, two tailed fox a moment before, but there was nothing there. He landed just as the first fragments of metal from the ship's disintegration crashed into the ground, mixed with the rain that had finally started to pour down.

"TAILS!" He looked around frantically, but could see no sign of the little vulpine.

"Sonic, he's gone!" Sally yelled, her voice cracking.

Bunny Rabbot sidestepped as a plate of metal the size of a small car smashed into the ground right by her, edge on, digging it's own trench. "We'd better get the hippety hop outta here too, Sugar-hog! Before we get our hares parted for us!"

"But..." Sonic turned, grabbed the two girls by the hands, and zipped away as more pieces of the hover ship fell to Mobius right where they'd been standing.

At a safe distance, he slowed and slumped to the ground. "Little bro... I couldn't save him..."

Sally shook her head, and knelt down in front of him. "Sonic, I saw what he was doing. He deliberately flew into that beam to stop it hitting us. There was no way you could have saved him, not without being hit too." You couldn't tell whether the water running down her face was the rain, or tears.

Bunny moved her ears to provide herself with a makeshift screen against the worst of the rain. She sniffled. "Sally-gal's right, Sugar-hog. I... I don't know why he did it, but Tails is smart. He wouldn't have done it without a darned good reason."

Sally plucked her PDA out of her boot holster. "Nicole, did you get any readings?"



"Inconclusive, Sally. The storm and the explosion of the vessel caused great disruption to my sensors. However, it was not a standard laser or plasma bolt. The energy type was unfamiliar. Tails' life-signs were detectable even after the energy burst hit him, so he may still be alive."

"A matter transporter effect of some kind?" Sally got back up, wiping her face with the back of one arm, and offering a hand to the hedgehog in front of her. "Maybe we'll find something at Weapons Cache 3, it's the closest place he could have gotten the fireworks."

The open door and the plundered explosives supply showed she'd been right. There was also a pair of electro-binoculars on a crate, but not a pair they'd seen before. Sonic reached to pick them up, but Sally stopped him.

"Nicole, analyse this!" Sally said, pointing her PDA at the device.

"It is an electronic magnification device, with additional facilities for recording audio and visual information. A laser sensor attached to the side allows it to eavesdrop on distant conversations by detecting vibrations in a window or thin wall. It currently has recorded data stored on its memory chip. Hair and DNA traces indicate it was recently used by Tails."

"Access and playback the recordings!"

"Scanning the memory... analysis of the content indicates it may prove distressing. Do you still wish me to play back?"

Sally visibly steeled herself, and then said, "Do it, Nichole!"

A goggles eye view of a workbench came into view, with Tails' paws working on a set of detonators, quickly and neatly adjusting each one in some fashion.

"If you've got this, I must have failed. There's a big red machine heading for the centre of the Great Forest. Stop it, whatever you do!"

It's got some kind of dimensional vortex cannon on that will transfer the whole of the Great Forest to another dimension! There's a recording after this one gives more detail and close-up pictures."

There was a short pause, and Tails' voice continued. "I'm going to try and stop it myself, using these explosives. I know I should come get Sonic and Sally, but I don't know how long I've got! If I let it get away, it may be too late to stop it! Please, Aunt Sally, don't be angry with me. It's not that I want to do it; I just have no other choice. I'll signal using the fireworks, so you should be warned anyway, whatever happens."

While he'd spoken, the images showed his point of view as he set up the charges, tweaked the control box, and put everything into a large satchel.

The little foxes' voice continued, with a slight quaver. "Sonic, I'm scared, worse than when you told those ghost stories, worse even than when we were face to face with Robotnik. After all, you were there, and I knew you'd find a way to save us. Now it's down to me, and I don't know if I can do it. Please, don't be disappointed. Whatever happens, I'll do my very best to be brave, just like you."

The goggles shifted, as Tails took them off and rested them on the crate. He was now in their field of view, and he looked around, checking he had everything.

His voice was quieter, and slightly steadier. "I'll make you all proud of me. Without Knothole and the Freedom Fighters, Robotnik wins and I won't let that happen. You're my friends, my family, and the only hope Mobius has left! It's my turn to protect you all, and I won't let you down. I love you all... It's starting to move... Goodbye!" They saw him reach down and press something out of sight, and the recording went blank.

"Nicole, play the other record..." Sally's voice was frighteningly monotone, flat and lifeless as a robot's. She slumped down on the crate.

"Sally, bio-sensors indicate you are in a distressed state..."

"Play it!"

The image of the hover ship floated above Nicole, and they saw the massive underside armament and the menacing spike of the dimensional vortex projector.

"That's one mean looking machine..." Sonic stated.

"Shhh... That's Robotnik! I'd recognise the slime trail his voice leaves anywhere." Sally's exclamation, while not exactly logical, did get the blue hedgehog to shut up, an amazing achievement by normal standards.

They listened as Robotnik gloated. Sally gulped down the lump that appeared in her throat, Bunny looked ill, and even Sonic looked more green than blue when he stated the target's probable destination. There was a slight sensation of relief as he gave Tails some slight chance of survival, but mainly the emotions of the group ran to a glowing anger.

Sally saw Sonic start to wind up for a racing start, and jumped in front of the entrance hole. "Hold it Sonic!"

"Ro-butt-head's gonna get a ro-butt-kicking so hard he'll be wrenching that armoured diaper off his head! He's a dead man!" There was none of Sonic's usual laid back humour in the comment, just a straight statement of how the future was going to be.

"No, that's what you'll be, if you just race in with blood in your eye and no plan!" Sally was openly crying now. "Tails just gave his... best effort to save you, are you going to just throw that away? I've lost one person I loved today, don't add to the total!"

Sonic was knocked back by the first part of the statement to miss the implication in the second part. But the first part stalled him long

enough for Bunny to grab onto him with both arms and dig her steel heels in. "Sally's right, sugah-hog. We can't waste what Tails did for us."

Sonic looked defiant for a moment, then slumped, shoulders down. He looked to be hurting far worse than that time they had to leave his reverting Uncle Chuck at the mono-rail station. "I have to do something... he was my best friend, my kid brother, more or less, and now he's gone!"

Bunny's grip turned from a restraint to a hug with a slight shift of posture. She brushed some quills on his shoulder flat with her regular hand, and rested her head on it, both ears drooping enough to make appear to be a lop. It was no longer certain who was holding up who.

"I know, lil' Tails was everybody's friend."

"We will, but not here, not now." Sally's voice had iron in it. "Don't you think I'd give anything to have him here right now? To burn his ears off with a talk on how he scared us, to hug him and tell him he was very brave, to say everything was alright again?"

She folded her arms. "The Freedom Fighters will know what Tails did, and together we'll make it count. Robotnik will be defeated, and afterwards, if there's the slightest chance of finding him, I'll get the best scientists on Mobius searching for him. Robotnik might think it's hopeless, but haven't we made careers of proving him wrong? C'mon, we need to get back to Knothole, and as fast as possible."

She stood aside, convinced that Sonic would never pass up a chance to show off his speed, but he just walked forward, up the slop and out of the hole. Sally gave Bunny a worried glance. She picked up Tails' electro-binoculars and they headed up after him, sealing the camouflaged door behind them.

# Tails of the Unexpected

## Chapter 2 - Tails of the Unexpected

Antoine was guarding the entrance to Knothole, or at least that's what he said when he'd been left there by the others. The fact that one sword wouldn't do much against the army of Swat-bots and patrol pods that would descend on him if Robotnik knew what he was guarding, he comfortably ignored. Dedicated training and long practice had made him almost as good at ignoring things he found inconvenient as he was with his sword.

The rain of the past hour had stopped, and he'd come out from under the broad leafed forest giant he'd been sheltering under. Rays of sunlight were breaking through the clouds, and moving across the glade that contained the entrance stump to the Freedom Fighters' secret village. The rain had also washed a lot of the mugginess and heat from the air.

There was a rustling in the undergrowth, and he tensed. Only Princess Sally, Bunny, Tails and that annoying Sonic were outside the Freedom Fighters camp at the moment, and it was most likely Tails. Sonic had probably been behind the massive boom he'd heard about an hour ago, and was probably still preening over whatever he'd just destroyed. Bunny and the Princess would most likely be with him, unless they were the ones bringing Tails back.

He straightened slightly, intending to put his best, guardian warrior pose on if it was the Princess, which meant he was somewhat non-nonplussed when the stranger appeared. A fox, as tall as Antoine himself, about the same age, and even more dressed up, not normal for a Mobian. A beam of sunlight momentarily haloed him as it passed, reflecting off webbing and polished metal.

Red and black boots, a green, short-sleeved jumpsuit and some sort of sleeveless leather jacket made up his costume, and white gauntlet

gloves adorned his paws. A white webbing belt supported some unfamiliar kind of gun, and a pocket computer. A staff of some kind was strapped to his back, and he had a wireless headset designed for fox ears.

His arms were bare, not muscle bound, but clearly trained. His movements also added to the impression, Ant was good enough himself to pick that up. The fox looked familiar, but Antoine couldn't place him. The fox clearly knew him, because he grinned and called out, "Mr Antoine! Gosh, you haven't changed a bit!"

"Who is coming 'ere!" the continental coyote challenged.

The fox looked puzzled, then shrugged. "I guess I have changed a bit... Shouldn't that be 'going there'?"

"You are not going anywhere, unless you are making the answer vite!" Antoine had his sword point up, and was in a ready stance. The voice was sort of familiar too, but once again he couldn't place it.

"Same old, same old..." The fox turned to present his back, and looked over his shoulder. "Notice anything familiar?"

The jacket had a large patch, yellow rimmed with orange, that might once have been part of a different top, based on the way it was made. It had some sort of complex black symbol. But it was the tails that hung below the jacket that caught Antoine's eyes. Three tails to be precise. "Yep, I'm Tails, but I kinda grew out a bit."

The coyote's eyes darkened, and he spat out. "Do you take Antoine D' Coolette for the great fuel? I have seen Robotnik's imitation of the Princess, and you are the far less convincing one. Maybe the real Tails was made captured by Robotnik while Sonic was off grandstanding. And now he sends the poor imitation."

"Hey, watch what you say about Sonic! He's so way past cool he may well be below absolute zero! And I am Tails, wouldn't you expect me to have changed after all this time?" The fox looked annoyed.

"What is it that you are speaking? I have been seeing you... I mean the real thing this morning only!" Antoine was fuming. "And you were your usual self. I mean..."

"This morning?" The fox suddenly stood stock still. "But... how long since Robotnik's dimensional vortex cannon was destroyed?"

"If you are meaning the biggish boom that I 'eard, that was just over an hour. The Princess went off to investigate the signals just before with Mademoiselle Bunny and that hedgehog..."

"An hour?" The fox chuckled, then started laughing helplessly. "One hour? And here I was hoping you'd all hold out long enough..." He stopped dead, pulling out his computer. "Uh oh... No, please don't let the time rates be that asynchronous. I've lost a family once... Plex, please bring up the equations for the Beltino dimensional interface, and could you show me a comparative scan using quantum signature analysis for this continuum and the Lylat-verse."

"Working Miles." The box spoke with a mechanical voice, and a hologram appeared overhead of a set of equations, and a pair of complex two dimensional surfaces, which overlaid each other. The fox examined it for a second, then sighed with relief.

"No temporal phase imbalance, or none to speak of. It should have shown up in the synchronisation parameters when we first established the gate anyway... And they'd have called early..." He slapped his forehead. "Dang, that was a waste of a perfectly good panic attack."

Antoine was not used to being ignored... well not by a complete stranger when Antoine had him at sword point. The fox was now off in a brown study. "Obviously there must have been some temporal index shift during one of the dimensional transits, probably Robotnik's..."

"You are to be putting yourself under my arrest!" Antoine stepped forward, thrusting at the fox to make his point. Almost absent

mindedly, the fox side-stepped and in the same move brought up a gauntlet and caught the point of Antoine's rapier between his fingertips. The annoying thing was he didn't even seem to be paying attention, it was like a reflex action.

Antoine tried to haul his rapier away, but it was like trying to remove it from a block of granite. He made a series of straining and grunting noises as he hauled on the hilt with both hands, bending the blade dangerously.

The fox just said, "Thanks Plex.", slotted the computer away in his belt holster. Then he seemed to notice the frantic French fighter. "Oh gosh! Sorry!" He let go and the coyote naturally tumbled backwards, letting go of his rapier, which clattered against a tree root near the Knothole entrance. Antoine measured his length on the ground.

It was the sort of unfortunate chance that seems endemic to heroic types that it was at that very moment that Sonic, Sally and Bunny trudged around a turn in the path and into the clearing. They saw Antoine tumble backwards to the floor, sword skittering away, and the red fox stranger standing over him, arm outstretched. This prevented them from making any detailed analysis of his appearance, which might have saved everyone a lot of trouble.

Bunny leaped in, feet first, calling out, "Antoine!"

The red fox spun around, and his initial expression was one of surprise and joy. "Aunt Bunny! Whoa!" He brought up both arms in a cross block, and took the flying double kick on it, sliding back a few feet as his tails flicked up and a slight golden glow flickered around the tips.

Antoine screamed out. "'E is the robot spy, claiming to be Tails! 'Ow else could he 'ave bested my swordsmanship!"

The red fox called out, "Wait, no..."



Bunny added a flying spin kick which the fox ducked under. "Uh uh, sugar, I've sent Swat-bots into walls with that move! I don't know what you're made of, but Robotnik's not insulting that brave little kit's memory with a phony!"

"But I am the real Tails! I'll prove it! Sonic, Big bro, you believe me, don't you?" He was continuing to back away, circling as he evaded or blocked Bunny's best attacks. Off to one side, Antoine was scrabbling to reach his sword.

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The blue hedgehog was simply winding up for a dash. "Don't you call me that!" He yelled. It was clear all the anger and depression at failing to save Tails had finally found an outlet. "No-one ever calls me that again but the real Tails! And not one of Robotnik's Bot-heads!"

He zipped forward into a Sonic Buzz-saw, a blue glowing disk capable of slicing through battleship steel. The fox made a mighty backwards leap, pushing Bunny off to one side with a force that sent her sprawling, and called out, "Tail-spin defence!"

His rebound went into a forward spin that became a glowing disk of yellow light. Sonic's attack hit it and the two rebounded off each other with a discharge of energy, Sonic flipping backwards while the other rebounded upwards off a tree trunk. The glow faded some, and unfolded into the fox, hovering there in Tail's own signature move, hovering on his rotating triple tails maybe twenty metres off the ground.

"Stop it, please!" There was genuine hurt in the stranger's voice. "I don't want to fight anyone... least of all you... except in sparring, maybe. I always wondered how my Tail-spin techniques would match up against the Buzz-saw... that was totally awesome, way beyond cool!" He was clearly enthused, then he sobered up and shook his head. "I'm sorry, I know this looks weird, but I can explain..."

"You can start by explaining why you attacked Ant.", Sally said, regarding him with folded arms.

"I didn't! He tried to poke me with his sword so I grabbed the tip, more by reflex than anything else. I was in the middle of working out something, and kind of forgot about him... uh, sorry about that Mr Antoine, but the time differential between continua is a tricky thing to analyse, it kinda took all my attention. He was trying to pull his sword free, I let go, he fell over."

Sonic was winding up again, but stopped at this explanation. "I've gotta admit, that sounds more like Ant's style..."

Bunny staggered to her feet. "Well he sure hits like monorail train!"

The fox shrugged. "I had to get you out of the way. Sonic looked real mad, and I didn't know what'd happen when we hit each other. You could have been hurt. Look, I said I can prove who I am. Problem is, while only an hour has apparently passed for you, I've experienced six years.

"I was sent to another dimension, several in fact as I tried to get back, and every step of the way I was also training so that next time I faced Robotnik, I wouldn't be so weak. But Nicole should have my old medical scans. If I come down, will you promise not to attack while she scans me. Heck, she should be able to tell you I'm not a robot right away."

Sally spoke in her command voice. "Sonic, Bunny, stand down! You too Ant! Very well, 'Tails'. Come down here."

The fox, who they now realised was no older than they were, flew down to stand in the middle of the clearing, as Sally pulled the pocket computer from her boot.

"Nicole. Scan this individual. Compare with the last medical scan of Tails."

"Working Sally... Subject is carrying numerous advanced artefacts, but he is fully organic. No active transmitting devices detected.

Comparison with Tails' medical file produces a 60 percent match, plus or minus 5 percent."

The fox spoke. "Nicole, compensate for 6 years of ageing on my telemere patterns."

Sally frowned, but said, "Do it."

"Match is now 97 percent, plus or minus 5 percent. Physically, the subject is physiologically equivalent to Miles Prower as a 15 year old, one who has undergone a high level of physical conditioning."

"Thanks Nicole." The fox smiled, and then they realised that he did look a lot like Tails, more grown up, but there was something familiar about the features, the expression, the attitude. But Sally still regarded him warily. "That doesn't explain how you just took Bunny's and Sonic's best shots without flinching."

"The same way I was always able to fly, or Sonic runs so fast. I studied under the Turtle Master..." He turned to show the symbol stitched to the back of his jacket. "... a powerful martial artist. Aunt Bunny, you're a martial artist, you know about ki."

"Sugah, are you claiming to be a ki master?" Bunny raised an ear as if it was an eyebrow.

The fox blushed and started examining his feet, "Not a master, but I can use it. I always did, I just didn't know what I was doing. Physically, there is no way my tails could generate enough lift to carry me, no matter how fast I spun them. But the whole time my ki was focussing in my tails, amplifying the air currents and driving them to create lift."

Sally was looking thoughtful, and Sonic and Antoine confused. The royal squirrel said, "Bunny, what is this 'ki' he's talking about?"

"Well Sally-gal, according to the old stories, it's life energy, or spirit energy. That's what 'ki' means in one of the ancient languages."

Every living thing has it, and martial arts is supposed to help you focus it. Mah sensei taught me a little about it, before he..." She hung her head sadly. He'd been one of the tutors from the palace, and one of few adults to escape to Knothole, and led freedom fighter missions until he was captured.

Sonic shook his head. "I thought martial arts was about being able to kick someone's kidneys out through their nose."

This was the perfect thing to bring Bunny out of her self imposed funk. The rabbit giggled, "Well, that too, Sugah-hog! Anyway the greatest masters were supposed to have been able to use it to amplify their abilities, pushing their bodies beyond normal limits. I guess I should have figured that was what Sonic and Tails were doing, but like I said, it was only old legends, and I was more interested in the 'kicking someone's kidneys out through their nose' part mah-self."

Tails nodded, "The Turtle Master's training was like that, the ki part, rather than the kidney kicking part, I mean. It forced me to apply the energy to other things. So I can be faster, stronger, tougher than my physical body would allow, everything I need to be the can-opener that will unload a massive amount of tail whopping on Robotnik's tin plated rear. And if I can do it, I know Sonic will easily." There was quite clearly still a lot of hero worship in his voice.

"If you want more proof I'm the real deal, I can tell you stuff only I would know. Remember, when he sent in a robot double of Sally, it was the things she didn't know that tripped her up. For example, if Robotnik even knew that the entrance to Knothole is over there, under that tree stump..." He pointed, "... he wouldn't send a spy, he'd send an army of Swat-bots."

He described some more features of Knothole village, and then added, "Aunt Bunny, you remember the last story you read to me? The one about those people who had to destroy a ring in a volcano, and I asked why they couldn't just get the big eagle to carry them there? I don't think anyone else heard that."

He turned to Sonic. "And I'll always remember the day before I... of course to you that's yesterday, isn't it? It was sunny, and we raced all the way to the end of Green Hills." His eyes are distant, and it's quite clear he's forgotten where he is and is enjoying reliving the memory. "We chilled out by the waterfall, the one with the funny tree that looks like it's smiling overhanging it, and you were saying that Sally should relax and smile more because you really like it when she..."

Sonic choked and spluttered, and even Tails realised that he was saying stuff that he really shouldn't. "Oops, sorry, you said I should never tell anyone..." Then he realised he was just making things worse. He waved his gauntleted hands in a negating gesture.

Sally was smiling, and Bunny was outright giggling. Antoine was just glaring, but he was glaring at Sonic, not the newcomer. Tails was standing there with a paw behind his head, and an embarrassed expression. The hedgehog himself was looking at the fox with surprise, and for the first time hope. The way he'd just reacted clinched it.

"Tails? It really is you?"

Tails' expression lit up at the change in Sonic's attitude. "Yeah, I'm back and ready to go rootin' and scootin' with my big bro!" He extended a fist, and Sonic matched him. As they exchanged the Freedom Fighter handshake. Tails said, "You have no idea how long I've wanted to do that... Hey does that mean I'm a Freedom Fighter now?"

Sally sighed. "Tails..." She realised she'd just admitted to herself that she was convinced he was the real thing too. "Tails, you were always a Freedom Fighter, just because you weren't allowed on missions never stopped anyone from thinking you weren't one of us..." She stopped as she saw tears brimming in the fox's eyes.

She decided to add, "And it's not going to stop me from burning your ears off about the stupid stunt you pulled back in the forest, mister."

That's the kind of leap first think later, or not at all, scheme I'd expect from Sonic, but I thought you had more sense!"

The fox looked subdued, not meeting her eyes. "I'd like to say it was a carefully calculated plan, that I figured the loss of the three of you would be a greater blow to the Freedom Fighters than me. But the truth is, you're right. I wasn't thinking, I just saw you guys in danger and moved to stop it. "

"And didn't think how losing you would hurt us! We thought you were dead! And dead in a horrible way! Because you protected us!"

"But I had no choice..."

"There was falling debris! A piece almost hit us seconds later. Couldn't you have diverted that into the beam instead?"

Tails took on a stunned expression. It was clear that he hadn't considered it.

The squirrel princess put her hand on her forehead and exclaimed wearily, and rather too theatrically. "Oh great Mobius, not another one... I can cope with one, but two of them?"

Tails had missed the theatre aspect, and now looked utterly downcast, so she added, "There's only one thing to do..." She stepped forward and hugged him tightly. The scent of his fur was different, but underlying it was the scent she knew from when he was a nine year old kit. But the body she was hugging was most definitely not a nine year old kit. If there was an ounce of fat on him, it was in his toes. Under his clothing, she could feel the solid muscles.

"Tails, don't ever make us feel like that again."

He was getting good at looking stunned, at least he was getting enough practice. He gingerly put his arms around her in return, glancing over at Sonic with a 'what can I do, she started it', expression.

Bunny Rabbot stepped up. "Stand aside Sally-gal, I want a piece of that!"

As Sally let go, she spun him around into a one armed hug, her real arm. He returned it with both, his head on her shoulder, eyes closed. "I missed you so much... all of you! Back when I was first transported, I cried myself to sleep..."

Sally put an arm upon his shoulder, the one currently free of rabbit, and he gingerly moved to hug her back. "Well you're back now, Tails."

Antoine fumed. This new Tails had made him look foolish and was taking all the attention from him. He was especially annoyed at the attention Sally was giving him. It was bad enough that Sonic hung around her constantly. "But wait! Princess, I was tumbled on the ground, should I not also have the hugging?"

Tails looked confused, and released the two girls. "I didn't think you'd want one, but okay." He moved across and hugged Antoine, who spluttered and gasped for breath ineffectually.

"Tails, I think he meant for Sally to hug him!" chuckled Sonic. Unlike Ant, he didn't feel threatened. He knew Tails, and he knew how he felt about the two girls. Nothing he'd seen had changed that opinion.

Tails stepped back, looking confused. "But she's not the one who got transported... Oh, you mean this is another case of him finding excuses to get close to... But I thought you and... Oh, I see! Miyu always said I was a bit slow on the uptake about that kinda thing..."

"And who's this Miyu, sugah-fox?" Bunny asked, ears all a-twitch with eagerness.

Tails' face lit up again, the way it had when Sonic acknowledged him. "Oh, she's my wing-mate and my best friend, apart from Sonic, but it's not quite the same.... We fly patrols, hang out together, go out for

mint choc ice-cream... She's fun, and pretty, and really brave and smart. I think she's sorta my girlfriend."

"Girlfriend?!" There was a massed exclamation, and a face-fault that might well have revealed Knothole to Robotnik if he'd had seismic sensors in the area.

Bunny picked herself up first. "Mah stars, it sounds like you've got a whole lot of story to get through, so what say we get the hippety hop outta here and you can tell us over a cool glass of carrot juice at Sally's place?"

"Okay!" Tails moved over to the concealed entrance and dived down it without hesitation. The others followed, their heads filled with question marks.



# Monkey Tails

## Chapter 3 - Monkey Tails

The interior of Sally's house was spacious, and with the ventilation panels open, it was a comfortable place to sit with friends and talk. Several of the other Freedom Fighters had seen them come in, but had quickly been waved off with an explanation that they'd explain later. The exception was Rotor. At first, he'd been as loath to believe the young fox in front of him was Tails as the others, but had quickly come around when provided with some of the physics via Plex, and several anecdotes.

"And now sugah, tell us all about this Miyu..." Bunny said, eyes sparkling with mirth.

"Well, it won't make sense without telling you about my father, my adoptive father, Fox McCloud, and how I became a part of Team Star Fox, and that won't make any sense without you knowing about Master Roshi's training, and my quest, well Goku's quest... Could I just start at the beginning?"

"Father?" Sonic said, sitting up in his battered armchair.

Tails shook his head. "I know I never knew my real parents, except for the vids Nicole showed me, and it's not like you guys didn't do a great job, but... He and Krystal are my family too, and I feel as much for them as I do any of you, or my original parents. I'm sorry, but it felt so good to be able to call someone mom and dad. It doesn't make me care less for anyone else..."

He sounded worried, almost as if he felt he was betraying them by admitting he cared for someone else, or maybe he was remembering they all had missing parents.

Sally said softly. "It's okay Tails. I'm not going to be jealous, I don't think any of us will be. I'm glad you were lucky enough to find someone."

Tails sighed with relief. Then he added, "Well that's why I'm here. When Robotnik's dealt with, we can de-roboticise everyone, and everybody will be reunited with their parents. I just hope mine will be proud of me, and not mind that I have another family..."

"Just tell us what happened!" Sonic said, fidgeting in his seat. "I don't usually sit still even this long!"

Tails nodded. "Well okay! The first part really comes down to me searching for some balls..."

&&&

Tails felt himself fall for a few seconds, then land with a thump on something soft and springy. He muzzily opened his eyes and focussed on his resting place. It was a cloud, and from the air moving over his body, and the vague blueness beyond the edge, it was flying along, quite fast.

Now while he hadn't done it often, he had occasionally flown up from a tall tree to investigate a low lying cloud, and knew that they were usually wetter, thinner, and not capable of supporting a fox who wasn't flying, which he wasn't as his entire body, tails included, felt as limp as a bunch of water-weed. They also ached as if they been pulled apart, molecule by molecule and put back together slightly wrong..

The conclusion was obvious. Either the dimensional rift had killed him, or the exit point had been so lethal it had killed him before he'd regained consciousness. Maybe he'd suffocated and frozen in the depths of interstellar space, or been vaporised in the heart of a star, or ripped to atoms by some unimaginable force... Nicole's science lessons offered dozens of potential hypotheses.

After the initial shock, Tails found with some surprise that the thought didn't scare him. After all, the worst had, by definition, already happened. And although it had undoubtedly been incredibly painful, he hadn't felt a thing. Also, the very fact he was now seeing blue skies and fluffy white clouds, was from what he'd heard, a hopeful sign.

He'd miss his friends... for a moment he felt almost ill with sorrow, but he reminded himself they'd be along, though not for a long time, he hoped. After all, if he'd qualified, they should be shoo-ins. And it wasn't as if he had anything else to do but wait... unless he managed to convince the Powers That Be to send him back as a ghost so he could haunt Robotnik. The idea of hiding in a closet and scaring the rotund robotic ruler out of his armoured pants cheered him enough to almost quench the longing to see Sonic and the others... almost.

He felt strong enough to attempt physical movement. He rolled over, groaning slightly and focussed on a face that was looking down on him.

"You're okay! And you must be a good person, 'cause you can ride on Kinto'un! Why were you falling out of the sky anyway?"

Tails almost freaked when he realised his questioner was an Overlander, like Robotnik and Snively. Then he reminded himself where he was. Maybe there were good Overlanders too, well, there must be. Besides this one was about as different from them as it was possible to be and still be the same species. He was a boy, no taller than Tails himself, he guessed, and he had a lot more hair than Sniveley or Robotnik, a spiky black mop that reminded Tails of Sonic...

Another stab of sadness caught him in the heart, and it must have shown in his face, because the boy exclaimed, "You didn't hurt yourself, did you?"

Tails pulled himself together. "Uh, no, I don't think so, apart from being dead."

The boy looked surprised. "You don't look dead, dead people don't move around as much."

"I was sucked to my almost certain doom by a dimensional vortex. I'm in heaven, flying on a cloud. I've flown through clouds before, and they don't act like this one."

"Uh huh." The boy guided the cloud somehow, and it dipped to skim the top of a cloud-bank, which did act like normal clouds. "Kinto'un is special! But this isn't Heaven, this is Earth."

Tails' strength was returning. He levered himself up into a sitting position. "Earth... the ancient name for Mobius..." He looked over the side of the cloud as it cleared the cloud-bank and saw land go past far beneath. "Then I'm not dead? But, how did I end up here?"

"I dunno." The boy shrugged. "I was flying towards the Turtle Master's place, and I saw a big purple swirly thing appear. Something fell out, that was you, and it disappeared. I flew down, figured you wouldn't enjoy hitting the ground much, and caught you."

"The exit of the vortex..." Tails suddenly remembered his manners. "Oh, sorry, thanks for saving me. I don't think I'd have woke up in time if you hadn't caught me. I'm Miles Prower, but everyone calls me Tails, actually I prefer it."

The boy beamed and held out a hand. "Pleased to meet-cha! I'm Son Goku, and everyone calls me Son Goku, or just Goku. Tails? I guess it's because you have two of them. I had a tail too, but it came off."

Tails winced. "That sounds painful!"

Goku shrugged. "I was asleep at the time. Maybe the monster pulled it off."

"Monster?" Tails asked.

There followed a potted history of the first dragon-ball quest, from Goku's point of view. (Go read 'Dragon ball' Volumes 1 and 2).

"... so now I'm on my way to Master Roshi's place, to get trained by him."

Tails had listened, eyes wide. He never considered the possibility that Goku was exaggerating. To be fair though, Goku has stuck pretty much to the truth as he'd seen it, being as basically honest as Tails.

The fox said, "Gosh, you're really amazing! I wish I was powerful like you, then I could help my friends... of course, first I'd have to find my way back to Mobius, and that's impossible. I don't know how to build a dimensional portal, and if I did, I have no idea where to point it." Tears formed in his eyes. "I so want to see Sonic and Sally, Bunny and Rotor and Antoine and all the others again..." He wiped his eyes.

Goku was a sucker for hard luck stories. "Maybe I can help! After I get trained up by Master Roshi, and the balls turn back to normal, I'm going to hunt for the dragon balls again. I gotta find grandpa's four star ball, anyway. You could come with me, and when we collect 'em all, I'll use them to send you home."

"You'd do that... for me? But we only just met!" Tails exclaimed.

"It's a martial artist's duty to help people." Son Goku stated.

"You and Bunny would get on well, she's a real good martial artist. I wish she'd trained me, but I'm still too young."

"How old are you?"

The fox looked down at his feet, depressed. "Nine. I'm too young to go on missions, to help defend Knothole, to do much of anything..."

Son Goku looked surprised. "I was training when I was nine. Had been for a long time. Maybe Master Roshi can train you too. Unless you've got something else you need to do?"

"No!" Tails looked up. "I mean, yes that would be fantastic!"

"So what are these missions you're talking about? Sounds like fun!"

Tails responded with a potted history of the war against the machines... Robotnik's not Sky-net's.

"... so as you can see, it's not fun, it's scary! I was really scared when I went up against that dimensional cannon, but I wanted to help even more. I hope Sally's not too mad at me."

"Wow! These friends of yours are neat! I'd love to have a sparring match with Bunny or Sonic. And this bad guy Robotnik does need his butt kicking! And you gotta be as smart as Bulma to figure out all that stuff. So you can fly with those tails?" Goku's responses came too fast for tails to answer, except the last one.

"Uh... yeah, but not as fast as... Kinto'un? Slow down and I'll show you." He stood up on the cloud stuff, finding it surprisingly easy to balance, wound up his tails and shot off ahead. He was powering ahead in full pusher propeller mode, but Kinto'un easily came up alongside.

Goku was enthused. "That's really cool! Maybe if I still had my tail I could learn to do that!"

"Thanks! Maybe it'll grow back and I can show you how." Tails replied. "It's the least I can do after you saved me."

"No problem. That settles it, we're going to get you trained up, and send you back, and then you can see your friends again... but we gotta get you some clothes."

"Why, are we going somewhere cold?" Tails asked, honestly confused. Mobian culture didn't have a nudity taboo, obviously, and clothes were worn only for decoration, or protection. He landed back on Kinto'un and sat down facing Goku.

"Uh huh. Grandpa said you wanted to be wearing clean, neat clothes if you wanted to make a good impression, and we want to make a good impression on Master Roshi. I don't really get it either, but grandpa's always been right before. Of course, both Oolong and Master Roshi have bunches of magazines with girls who aren't wearing anything." The young sai-jin shrugged. "Maybe it's different for girls."

"Uh... so where can we get some? Clothes, not panties. I don't have anything I can use..."

"Well, Yamcha bought some for me at that place with the rabbit king. I think you need money though."

While the society of Knothole was communal, he'd learned about about money and trade in his history lessons with Nicole. He mentally tallied his assets. One empty satchel, one short range radio detonator inside. One pocket tool-kit, in a side pocket.

"Maybe I can fix stuff for money... or do some other work."

Goku suddenly brightened up. "I know, Bulma knows lots about clothes. She's an inventor too, like you. Maybe she can find something for you. She said she lived in East City, so I guess we go East."

"But isn't that the opposite way to where you were going?"

"It's okay, Kinto'un's real fast, we'll be there and back in no time."

&&&

East City was huge. Neither of the two travellers had ever seen this many people. To Tails, it seemed even bigger and more sprawling than Robotropolis, but where Robotnik's city was empty and quiet except for the endless background susurations of his robot factories, this place was full of life.

Too full. Hovering on the cloud above the side-walk, they drew a lot of stares and pointing. Goku looked around. "No, wonder Bulma's weird! This is a real strange place, and noisy too."

Tails was shrinking into the cloud, embarrassed at the attention. "Maybe I'd better sit on Kinto'un and go up out of the way. You can call it in when you get to Bulma's place. You know where to go?"

The saiijin shook his head. "Not a clue!" Tails managed the impressive feat of face-faulting into Kinto'un.

Goku buttonholed the nearest rubbernecker. "Hey mister, do you know how to get to Bulma's house?"

The male, a wolf, looked down at the kid. "Who? Why should I know that? How are you doing that, is there some kind of wire holding it up?"

"Huh, oh, Kinto'un. Nope it flies all by itself. Weird, you live in the same town, and you don't know where someone lives..."

The bystander, nonplussed, said, "If you want to find somewhere, you could always ask a policeman."

"Okay, thanks!" Goku turned to the cloud. "Kinto'un, go up out of the way until I call, and take good care of Tails." The little cloud obediently shot off, carrying the small fox.

"Now, what is a police..." He looked around, but the wolf had gone. He wandered down the street, maybe there'd be a sign showing where to find a 'policeman', there certainly seemed to be signs for everything else.



Suddenly he heard, "Okay, who's next. 100000 zeni, all you have to do is defeat me! Step right up!"

Suddenly Goku remembered that you needed money to buy clothes and zeni were money. He threaded his way through the crowd and found an over-muscled guy with boxing gloves haranguing the crowd. "C'mon, are you all cowards?"

Two of the men were muttering. "Why don't you try?" "Not a chance, that guy's a kempo master!"

Goku stepped forward. "I'll fight! Just wait while I put down my backpack"

There was laughter, and the guy looked down in amazement. "Huh? Kid, that's not funny!"

Goku looked puzzled. "I didn't make a joke!"

The guy posed theatrically. "So you think you can defeat me? Well I normally charge a 10000 zeni entrance fee, but I'll waive it in your case, poor kid. I'll even give you the first shot free."

"Great! Then I won't be too hard on you." Goku sprung out into the clear area as the guy shrugged with a 'what am I supposed to do expression' playing to the crowd. "Okay kid, let's get it over with."

"Here I come!" Goku shot forward, and had his fist buried in the other fighters gut before he could even react. He collapsed to the ground, gasping for breath as the crowd gasped in amazement. "Give up?"

The fighter pushed himself to his feet. "No... of course not! So you learned a little kempo somewhere?"

"Yup, I've been training!"

"Oh course, well, now I know..." He went into a proper stance. It didn't help.

"Ready or not, here I come!" Goku sprung forward in a straight up kick that went straight into his jaw. The fighter reeled back, clutching his injured face. "Owww..."

Rather than press the advantage, Goku asked, "You ready to beg for mercy yet?"

The other fighter was furious. "You... brat!" He swung on Goku with a punch that would have felled a horse, and probably overturned the cart it was pulling. However, the small saijin just ducked under it, readying for a jumping head-butt.

With a "Hoyo!", the fighter followed up with a rising knee that should have split his head, but Goku just sprung backwards, rebounding off the ground some feet away to come back in a fast flying kick.

"Look out!" He called sportingly, and the other fighter did, ducking to the side just in time to avoid a foot in the face. Instead, it hit the stone wall, and knocked a hole in it... a big hole. The fighter imagined that as his head... "Eep! Mercy!"

Goku looked at the 100000 zeni the fighter had reluctantly handed him. "Great! Could you tell me where to find a policeman?"

The fighter looked up from tending his bruised jaw. "You've got the money! Why do you need a policeman?"

"Oh, I'm just trying to find a place."

"Look for a box with the sign 'Police' on it, there's one three streets over. You'll find one there..." The fighter hurried away, not wanting to have dealings with the police, or this overpowered kid.

The police officer manning the police box was quite old, with spectacles and a short white moustache. He was surprised to see a spiky haired kid approach. "What can I do for you sonny? Lost your mom?"

"Uh huh, I'm looking for Bulma's house."

"Who? Do you have her ID number, or even an address anything?"

Goku looked puzzled. "Why would I need a dress? I'm a boy. Girls wear dresses. Except Bulma, who wore shorts, or a bunny costume..."

The policeman frowned, thinking he was being made fun of. "Why are you trying to find this 'Bulma', anyway?"

"Well I was flying along on my magic cloud, and this two tailed fox fell out of the sky, and I caught him, and he wants the Turtle Master to teach him martial arts so he can go back to his own world and beat up on this evil dictator who's turned everyone into robot slaves, but he didn't have any clothes and he should to make a good impression, that's what my grandfather said, so we came to see Bulma, who's a girl, and knows a lot about clothes. "

The policeman looked annoyed. "I should arrest you for wasting police time. Flying cloud? I'd like to see that!"

"Okay." Goku gave a loud whistle, and called out, "Kinto'un!"

In seconds the cloud was there, floating in front of the police box and carrying a two tailed fox.

"Uh... okay..." The policemen closed his mouth, which had dropped open, and gathered himself. He turned to the terminal inside the police box and started punching keys. "I'll do a computer enquiry. I'm not supposed to do this for civilians... but I guess... Not exactly a common name so it should be... B U L M A... Three entries... Here!"

He turned a screen to face them, showing a picture of a dumpy female. "Is this her?"

"Uh huh." Goku shook his head.

The policeman pressed a key and the head-shot changed. "How about her?"

"Yep! That's Bulma..." Goku nodded so rapidly, his hair created it's own micro-climate.

The policeman checked the readout. "Are you sure? This is the daughter of the founder of the Capsule Corporation! How would she know you?"

"We met when she was searching for these magic balls that grant whoever has them a wish. She was going to wish for a boyfriend, but the wish got used by a shape-shifting pig called Oolong for something else, to stop this guy called Pilaf taking over the world, but she met this desert bandit called Yamcha and I think she's decided he's going to be her boyfriend... whatever that is."

The policeman decided not to ask for proof, considering what happened the last time. Eight more days to go until retirement... "I don't suppose you know her phone number either..."

Goku looked puzzled again. "What's a phone?"

"Of course." He sighed. "I think it's best if I take you there myself, and stay while we find out if she does know you. Capsule Corps is a global technological power." He came out of the box and pulled out a hover-scooter. "It wouldn't look good if it turned out I'd sent a lunatic there, would it?"

"I guess not." Goku shook his head, then asked Tails. "What's a lunatic?"

"A crazy person." Tails looked nervous. "You didn't tell me she was so important. Maybe we shouldn't bother her."

"Aw... It's okay." Goku hopped up onto Kinto'un. "Neither of us is crazy."

The police scooter led them across town to a massive domed house that was larger than most of the office buildings and sat in it's own private park.

Tails eyes were wide. The only time he'd ever seen buildings as big as that was on his one trip to Robotropolis with Sonic. And this was someone's house? "Gosh! It's huge!"

"Man, it's going to take forever to find her..." Goku said. He bounded off the cloud and called out, "BULMA! HEY BULMA! IT'S ME, SON GOKU!"

The policemen and Tails took their hands off their ears and the former said, "Hey! No need to shout! There's an intercom right there..." He raised his eyes to heaven and sighed at Goku's non-nonplussed expression. He pressed the button himself, as Tails explained to Goku what an intercom was.

"Um... excuse me? I believe there is someone by the name of Bulma residing here?"

A robotic voice responded. "Mistress Bulma is currently at home. Who shall I say is asking for her?"

Goku stepped up. "It's me, Son Goku, miss intercom." Tails shook his head, he didn't think Goku had quite gotten his explanation.

There was a pause of a few seconds. Then Bulma's voice came from the speaker. "Goku? How did you get here? All by yourself? I'll be there in a minute."

"I brought a friend, and this Mr Policeman helped me."

After a few seconds, the front door opened, and Bulma came out, wearing one of her short tops and pairs of rolled up denim pants. She strolled down to the front gate. "It is you! I thought you were going to the old letch's place."

"No, I was going to Master Roshi's, but Tails here needed some clothes."

"Tails?" Bulma looked over at Tails, who was practically trying to sink into Kinto'un with all the attention. He finally decided that putting on his best Sally taught manners couldn't hurt. It was much the same as when he introduced himself to Goku. He wasn't fond of his given name, but it was probably best he used it.

He bowed his head slightly. "Miles Prower, at your service. Goku rescued me from falling when a dimensional portal sent me here. He's going to help me get back to my own world with the dragon-balls, and until we can search for them, I want to train with Master Roshi so I can be stronger when I go back."

Bulma was surprised. Compared to Goku, this kid was the soul of courtesy, if obviously out of his furry mind. She smiled back at him. "Nice to meet you, Miles. But I thought Goku called you Tails?"

"Oh, that's what my friends call me." Tails, encouraged by her friendly reception, stood up on the cloud. "Because of these..." His twin tails sprang up, waving proudly. He wound up and spun them, flying up in hover mode to lower himself down besides Goku.

"Wagga!" Both the policeman, who should have been expecting more weirdness, and Bulma, who hadn't, did the devil pose.

Tails noticed their shock and immediately apologised. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare anyone!"

Seeing that the poor kid was at least as freaked by their reaction as they were by his flying, Bulma calmed down. "No, it's okay, I should expect this kind of thing around Goku by now. C'mon in! Are you guys hungry or thirsty? Scratch that, I know Goku is always both!"

&&&

As they flew away from West City, Tails remarked, "Your friend Miss Bulma is really nice! And really smart too, maybe even smarter than that old Ro-butt-nik!"

He was now wearing a Capsule Corps jump-suit, tailored for his body, down to a tail hole.

"Yeah, Bulma's a good friend, but she can be scary at times too!" Goku rubbed the back of his head.

The small fox and the genius teen had hit it off quite well. In the end, they hadn't had to spend any of the money Goku had collected. A repeat of the history Tails had told Goku had engaged her sympathy, and his obvious interest in the gadgetry and nervousness about the household robots had intrigued her enough to offer to show him some of the things she'd been working on.

Even the most self confident genius inventor doesn't mind having their ego stroked, and Tails' unfeigned enthusiasm for her inventions, and surprising understanding of what they entailed, was pleasing. The level of gosh wow caused by the demonstration of a Capsule had been amusing, as had the revelation that her father had invented it. Unfortunately, or fortunately from her perspective, both her parents were away, so she was spared the embarrassing antics that would have resulted.

His radio-detonator was duly noted as simple, but showing good instincts, especially the last minute improvisation. There was also a certain amount of respect from the way he'd acted, when she got the full story of his arrival from him.

He grasped the basic principles of the dragon ball radar when shown the designs, and even followed partly her explanation of the half finished micro-watch. This was a device, based on Capsule technology, that would allow her to shrink herself, and it was something she'd been working on when they called.

In Bulma's position, she'd had enough people sucking up to her because of her position or appearance to spot it, but Tails was possibly even less guileful than Goku, and it showed. The fact that all Tails wanted was advice made a pleasant change, and Bulma, in one of her typical impulsive decisions, decided she could help more than that.

He'd ended up with two CC jumpsuits in his size, plus a set of cold weather gear and some hard wearing outdoor children's wear, as well as a capsule chest to hold it all in, all ordered through the Briefs account. The capsule case with it in now rested in his pocket.

She'd also lent him her second best capsule tool-kit, and her grade-school pocket computer, which she'd also loaded with a basic reference library of DBZ technology. When he got embarrassed and said he couldn't accept such a nice gift, she waved it away with her usual Bulma style hard headedness, insisting that if he wanted to be an inventor, he needed the proper tools, and it was nice to see someone who was interested in training more than their muscles.

The grand tour and shopping spree had lasted until sunset, and so they'd stayed the night in the Briefs mansion's guest quarters, and had a big breakfast. Now they were heading on to the Turtle Master's island, a day and a half later than Goku would otherwise have arrived. Tails had his muzzle in the pocket computer, and Goku was just enjoying the flight.

Tails sighed, and Goku looked over his shoulder. "Somethin' wrong?"

"No, this stuff is way past cool!" Tails looked up from the screen. "I finally have a computer all to myself, and it has lots of neat stuff on. Nicole was only available when Sally wasn't using her for planning or on missions. It's just... what I'd really like to do, after Robotnik's defeated, and Mobius is saved, is go to school, a real school with teachers and kids my own age."

"Huh?" Goku could not get his head around this. The idea of formal schooling was pretty much a closed book to him. "You \_want\_ to go



to school? Why? You already know lots."

"It's fun knowing stuff, and even more fun learning new things. Besides, I need to know about technology so I can use it to make things. You could just as well ask why you fight."

"Uh... I like fighting... I like seeing how good I am against other fighters..." Goku had never really considered this. The sun shone, fish swam, he liked fighting. "And I can help protect people, and make sure bad guys don't do bad stuff."

Tails thought about it. "So you like the challenge, and the chance to do something good with your skills. I feel the same way. But I can challenge myself by solving problems, figuring out new ways to make things, and improving using existing stuff. And I can also help people with my inventions, and stop bad guys like Robotnik from misusing technology to hurt people."

Goku was simple, not stupid. Put in terms equivalent to his, the previously closed book opened a crack. "That... makes lots of sense! But you want to learn to fight too."

"I have to. I'm not strong enough yet to help my friends, to protect them. I mean, gosh, I couldn't even save myself."

"You'd have gotten away if you hadn't stopped that beam thing hitting your friends. You saved them then."

Tails smiled ruefully. "But If I'd been better, I might have had a better option than 'me or them'." He put a gloved hand to the back of his head. "Sally gets mad enough when Sonic does something like that. I don't want her to be mad, I want her to be proud of me." He sighed. "If I ever get to see her, or any of my friends again."

"Aw, I'm sure she will be. And we'll get you back. I've got the Dragon-ball radar, and I've done it once before. It's gotta be easier the second time." There was an ominous rumble of thunder. "In the meantime, you got me as a friend. And Bulma too."

The small fox sniffed slightly, and wiped a paw across his eyes. "I'm really glad. You've both helped me so much. Thank you!"

Goku looked embarrassed at the open admiration in Tails' expression, and put one hand behind his head. "Heh, anyone woulda done it..."

**Authors Notes:** For reference, Akira Toriyama always said, Zeni, the Dragonball world currency, was equivalent to Yen. So if you read 100 Zeni as 1 dollar, you won't be far out. Being British, I use 150 Zeni to 1 pound, but I suspect a lot of my readers will like dollars better.

Also, if you're not too familiar with Anime, 'the devil pose' is a pose where the arms and legs are splayed akimbo, generally to show that then person in question is surprised or shocked. Why? Ask a manga artist, I just write stuff.

# Tails Turns Turtle

## Chapter 4 - Tails turns Turtle

They arced down across the blue tropical sea to the islet that was home to the Turtle Master. The clap-board shack and palm trees looked exactly as they had the last time Goku had been there. They'd stopped on shore, and Tails had gotten into his new 'neat' outfit, a shirt and short pants with a waistcoat.

The fox tugged at the collar. "I'm not sure about this... I know Ms Bulma said it made me look smart, but is it right for meeting a martial arts master?"

"It'll be okay." Goku said, with his usual blithe confidence.

Master Roshi was already outside, and next to him was a bald headed kid in a gi, with a set of six dots on his forehead. A turtle was nearby, shaking water off his shell.

The ancient master looked up. "Goku! So you returned for your training... but who's your friend?"

"Hey, Turtle guy! This is Tails, he needs to learn to fight, and I figured since you were really strong and stuff you could teach him, too."

Tails dropped down off the cloud, and bowed politely. "Good morning Master Roshi, sir. I'm Miles Prower, but my friends call me Tails. Goku said you could teach me to be a strong martial artist like him."

The old man had rarely seen a less prepossessing candidate for martial arts training. The kid could not yet be ten, and although he was clearly alert and intelligent, and probably quite agile, his stance showed he had no martial arts training whatsoever. However, he couldn't just say no and ruin his inscrutable old master pose.

"I'm afraid you may not be able to take my training, young man. I have not taken on new students since the Ox king and Goku's own grandfather, and they were both exceptional martial artists already. Kurilin here has demonstrated he may have what it takes to be my disciple..." He thought of the huge stack of adult magazines the young monk had brought him, "... but he has been training at Orin temple for 8 years. And Goku has demonstrated similar abilities..."

His heart strings were tugged by the way the young fox's face fell. But Tails only paused for a second. "I'll prove I can do it! I'll do whatever you ask!"

The old man sighed with relief internally. This gave him an out. "Very well lad, but this island is too small to test you properly."

He moved over to the house and pressed an inconspicuous button. It shrunk into a capsule. He thought of sending them out to find a girl as their test, but his stuffy old turtle companion had returned early.

He activated a capsule hovercraft and they set off for a nearby larger island. Tails was still sparkling slightly over the coolness of capsules, but mentioned to Goku, "I don't think he was too impressed."

"Aw, don't worry. I'm sure you can pass whatever the old man comes up with."

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The four of them were standing some way from the house's new location.

Master Roshi took his best wise old master pose. "First, we must see what you are each capable of. From this boulder to that tree is 100 metres precisely. How fast can you cover the distance? Not that a fast runner will make a great martial artist, but it's always good to have strong legs."

Kurilin smirked. "I'll go first. I could qualify for the Olympics, if I wanted to."

His boast proved accurate as he shot past the tree after only 10.4 seconds.

The young monk panted out. "Not bad. My personal best is 10.1, but considering the circumstances..."

Goku had gotten new shoes when Tails had his clothing, and so whistled past the tree, and the master holding the stopwatch fast enough to make the old man's beard whip like a flag.

"Eight... eight point five seconds..." Master Roshi said weakly, then pulled himself together. Kurilin looked at him, jaw agape. "What... what kind of training... did you have!"

Goku looked non-plussed. "Is that fast?"

By comparison, Tails, who'd changed into a jumpsuit, made a run of 14 seconds, a good time for a fast runner, but no-where near the others.

"You see lad, you're just not up to the level needed to be a Turtle student." Master Roshi said kindly. "The others were at the limits of human achievement, but to master my training, you must go beyond human limits. Kurilin, clock my time."

The old man handed the stopwatch to the monk, and removed his turtle shell. He then proceeded to astound the others by clocking a time of 5.6 seconds.

"Not bad for an old codger, eh? With training and discipline, both Kurilin and Goku should be able to break 5 seconds. You see lad, you're just not ready, though I commend your enthusiasm."

Goku protested. "But he really is..." Master Roshi waved him into silence. "Lad, your heart does you credit, but you have to realise that

most people are not as able as you."

Tails looked at his shoes, then looked up at the Turtle Master. "So if I could do 100 metres in under 5 seconds, would you train me?"

Master Roshi mused. There was no way the kid could do it. "Alright. But no machines or anything. You have to do it strictly under your own power."

The young fox nodded. "Okay!" He went to the starting point, twisted up his tails as far as he could go, and bounded forward. While he couldn't keep up with Sonic in a sprint, or Kinto'un at full pace, he could easily match Sonic's cruise velocity, which meant he covered the distance with his tails in pusher propeller mode 3.8 seconds.

He shot past the astounded master, and looped round to land in front of him. Goku cheered and bounced in to grab the fox's hands. "Yay! I toldya you could do it!"

Kurilin was just standing there, repeating his impression of a railway tunnel. "But... how..."

Master Roshi was mentally palm slapping his forehead for having been fooled by appearances. Now he looked deeper, within the young fox was a power, not yet realised, but a potential almost as great as Goku's own. Maybe, just maybe, he could bring that out... But the child couldn't be more than 10, could he possibly have enough determination to stay the course, or learn fast enough?

Fortunately, he managed to keep a more dignified mien this time. "I'd like to know that too, lad... Miles. I've never seen anyone do that before, or heard of any such technique. Not that most martial artists could do it anyway."

Tails put glove to the back of his head, looking embarrassed. "I just, well, it's not that fast. You should see my friend Sonic, when he goes all out, he breaks the sound barrier! That's how I started, It was way,

way past cool. I wanted to be like him, so I watched him, and ran, and tried to go faster, but I never could.

"Then I was searching Nicole's... she's Sally's personal computer, but she also acts as my teacher, since there isn't a school in Knothole... anyway I was looking up really old files, and I mean really ancient... and I found pictures of aircraft that didn't use hover-units or rockets, or even an electric jet turbine like the Freedom Stormer, but propellers, external spinning aerofoils.

"Some pulled themselves through the air, some pushed, some could even lift themselves, and I thought maybe if I could move my tails like that... or rather like an insect's wing sweeping back and forth, creating thrust, I could do something similar. So I worked at it, and practised real hard, and one day... I just made it work. Of course, now I know more about how aerofoils work, I know it shouldn't, but..."

The fox shrugged. "When I figured that out, I wasn't able to do it for a couple of weeks, but I eventually decided that the books didn't have all the answers. I've never come up with a theory of how it works, but I will one day. It's not like I have time or materials to build proper scientific instruments and research it. But I will when Robotnik is finally defeated."

"Since then I've just kept practising. Now, at least I can keep up with Sonic when he isn't in a hurry. Of course, I can only do it for a few minutes before I have to rest." He looked sad and sighed. "Golly, I miss him in the worst way... Sorry, I shouldn't still go on about it, Goku says he can return me there with the Dragon Balls, so I will see them all again."

This lead to a third explanation of Tails' history. Master Roshi had to hold his nose to prevent a fatal haemorrhage when he found out that Tails lived in the same house as Princess Sally, and that the Princess generally didn't wear anything more than boots and an open jacket.

Then he used the same telepathy he would later use on Namu in the Tenka-ichi Budōkai to watch the kit's thoughts, purely to check some of his more remarkable statements, of course, and calmed down when he realised she was a squirrel/chipmunk anthromorph. He might be a major hentai, but furry people weren't one of his interests.

He saw a city of sparkling white towers, known only from recordings, and the dark swath of smoke spewing factories that had replaced it, a group of mere children fighting a war against incredible odds, and winning victories despite them. A blue hedgehog who was lighting incarnate, a rabbit martial artist who was half robot, a walrus engineer working miracles with left over junk, and a squirrel princess who had been forced to be wise and brave far beyond her years.

And in the background, a small fox who idolised them, and supported them in small ways, but wanted to do more. A child who without training had still managed to tap a portion of his own power without even realising what he'd done, through sheer perseverance and effort. Yes, he would do...

He took his best wise master pose, and stated, "Very well, I shall train you all in the the Kame-senin School Bu-jutsu... the arts of the Turtle Master."

He felt he should re-establish his masterliness, so he added, "But first, let me just say a few words about the martial arts. One does not study the martial arts in order to pick a fight, or have girls say 'Ooooh! You're so \_strong\_!!'..."

He noticed Kurilin looked distinctly unhappy for a moment, before schooling his face into an expression of attentive listening once more.

"One masters these arts for health in mind and body, for the ability to live one's life as uniquely, courageously, and energetically as one wishes! And if there are any who seek to terrorize you or any decent people, you must use your skills to fight them, and protect innocent people from harm."



Tails was looking eager, and Goku confused.

"Did you understand that?" The turtle master asked Goku.

The young saiijin shook his head. "Uh uh, not a word."

The ancient master huffed, "Train hard, enjoy life and beat bad guys... got that?"

"Oh, that's easy!" Goku grinned irrepressibly.

"Great, he's a moron..." muttered Kurilin.

&&&

A side trip for Goku and Tails to get groceries, on the basis that Tails could cook, and they both could ride Goku's magic cloud, led to them rescuing a bi-polar girl called Launch from some police, or possibly vice versa. At a sneeze, she flipped from a dark haired home-maker to a blonde haired homicidal maniac. But that's another story.

Nice Launch took over the cooking, but was helped by Tails, which prevented a nasty case of food poisoning from improperly prepared puffer fish. So a decent evening meal was had by all, without any further trials and tribulations.

The next day, the training began... At 4:30 am.

All three students were bleary eyed, but followed when the master told them to follow at a jog... to a milkman's house.

"Halt!" The turtle master, then to the milkman, "I'm Kame-sennin, the one who called yesterday?"

The milkman, who was actually a bull anthromorph, said, "Ah, right, right! Here's a map of the delivery route."

"Alright boys, pick up a crate each, and let's deliver milk."

"Deliver milk?" was Kurilin's response.

"It'll be good exercise."

The milk-bull... (that sounds wrong somehow) looked surprised.

"You're doing it on foot, not using the helicopter?"

"Don't be silly, if I did that, it wouldn't be training!" He turned to his three disciples. "Two kilometres to the first house, skipping!"

Tails was finding it hard going, the crate was heavy, but he trusted Kame-sennin knew what he was doing. He ran down the next stretch, zig-zagging along a tree-lined path, boosting himself along with his tails, until Kame-sennin stopped him.

"Tails! If you rely on your tails all the time, you'll never grow stronger! From now on, you keep your tails still."

The panting young fox puffed out a "Yes, master!"

"Kurilin, you're lagging too. If we take too long, the milk will go sour." The next house was at the foot of a mountain, and after delivering the milk, Master Roshi pointed at a set of stairs, leading up.

"Since this is your first day, you don't have to take these at a run. The next house is at the top."

Even Goku was panting when he reached the top of the mountain, and Tails was just about all in, an expression of determination on his face as he plodded up the steps. Fortunately an active lifestyle in the Great Forest meant while this was pushing him to his limits, it wasn't beyond his abilities. He rested against an outcrop, then pulled himself straight as he realised the master's eye was upon him.

"Not as easy as you believed?" Master Roshi asked mildly. He was sitting on a rock next to the house they were delivering to.

"I'll... do... whatever it... takes, Master!" Tails gasped.

"Ol'timer, couldn't I just deliver these on Kinto'un?" Goku asked.

"That wouldn't be training now, would it? I remember your grandfather and Gyu-Mao delivering milk the same as you are right now..."

Kurilin was putting down a fresh milk bottle when an bald fellow with a moustache came out of the house. "My, My, thank you very much."

"Hiya!" said Goku waving, and got a bonk on the head from Master Roshi's staff. "It's not 'Hiya!' you say 'Good morning.'" Goku complied, rubbing his head as Kurilin smirked.

The other guy just chuckled. "Venerable Muten Roshi, it has been a long time. You look as hale and hearty as ever, and are these your new students?"

"Only just, but I feel all three have considerable potential." That perked all three of the youngsters up. "If they train diligently, they may well be able to enter the tournament 8 months from now."

"Oh ho, the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, eh?"

Kurilin choked. "The... the Strongest Under the Heavens tournament?"

"What's that?" asked Tails, beating Goku by a heartbeat.

"It's an awesome martial arts tournament, they gather masters from all over the world to discover who's strongest... Master, you really think we could be ready to enter it?"

Master Roshi nodded, "If you train without shirking. However, winning should not be your aim. Life isn't that easy. But I feel if you have a goal to achieve, you will train harder."

"Oh yeah... just to enter..." Kurilin was practically sparkly eyed.

Goku asked. "There's going to be lots of strong guys there right?"

"If it'll help me get stronger..." Tails nodded. "Okay, I'll give it my best effort!"

The trio started out with renewed strength along the single log bridge that was the only way across a canyon on their path. Tails was as much at hazard as the others because he was too tired to even twist his tails if he fell off. They walked across quick sand, and waded through a river (with waterfall), and got chased by a dinosaur before their delivery route came to an end.

They staggered back to the Kame House in the morning sun, except for Master Roshi who treated the whole thing like a morning constitutional.

"We're done, finally!" gasped Goku, flat out on the ground.

"Now that was your early morning routine. Now for your morning routine..." The master said, to a universal groan of pain.

Master Roshi's training consisted of ploughing fields with their bare hands, and doing construction work, and being tied to a tree on a rope, and dodging angry hornets. It was mitigated by big meals, an hours rest at midday and an hour of study. Tails found he was eating like never before, and did well in the classroom.

However, he was straining to keep up with the others, even though his fox paw hands (the gloves had quickly come off, both literally and figuratively) were better for digging than human ones, and his fur meant he was a less attractive target for the hornets. Still he kept at it, pushing himself as hard as possible, without complaint. It was Goku who spoke up first, in the afternoon, when they'd run across to the opposite edge of the island, by a salt water lake.

"Old timer, instead of this, can't you teach us some moves?"

The old master spat off to one side, and turned to him. "You little fledglings! How dare you be so insolent! You've barely begun to lay

the foundations of strength and stamina and you expect me just to start teaching you moves?"

He strode over to a rock, one over 2 metres in diameter. He set his palms against it and pushed, driving it forward several meters and leaving a deep furrow in the dirt. Kurilin goggled, and Tails was awe struck.

"Now do you understand?" Master Roshi exclaimed. "Give your all to the training regimen every day, and you'll be able to do that. Then you'll be ready for some moves."

Behind him, Goku had come up to the rock, and set his hands against it. With a Rrrrrrrr! he shoved it along. "Whoopie! I did it master!"

Master Roshi goggled for a second, before saying, "Oh, I didn't mean for you to move that little rock. Anybody could do that." He moved over to one about the size of a large house. "When you can move this one, then your strength training will be complete."

He breathed a little sigh of relief when Goku failed to move it an inch.

"You can move it?" Goku exclaimed, and Kurilin added, "Wow! Please, master, show us."

Master Roshi, examined the rock for a moment, then he noticed Tails' shoulders slump, and with some relief asked. "What is is lad?"

"I... I don't know if I can ever do that, even Aunt Bunnie would have trouble with it." He looked up at the old master. "I'm not giving up! But I don't see how I could ever get that strong."

Master Roshi was glad of the diversion. "Didn't I tell you that you must go beyond human limits, young man... fox? Isn't that exactly what you do when you fly using your tails? You have an exceptional talent for using your ki. Your tails by themselves couldn't move as

fast as, or act as a propeller, but empowered and shaped by you ki energy they can."

One Obi-wan Kenobi duct tape explanation of ki later ('It has a light side, a dark side, and binds the universe together') he finished with.

"Hmm... I believe I have an idea that can benefit all of you. Kurilin! After your daily strength training is complete, you will spend two hours training Miles in the basics of martial arts, strikes, blocks, kicking, how to take a fall. Also, focus, awareness, discipline. You have the most formal training, and teaching others should help you to review and improve on your own skills."

Kurilin was about to protest, when he realised that all he'd have to do is show how to do the moves. He could then stand, or sit around, critiquing Tails rather than working up a sweat of his own. "Yes master!"

"Goku. You'll act as Miles' sparring partner. Too often, you let your strength carry your fighting style at the expense of sloppy technique. This should tighten it up, and teach you restraint. Take care."

"Okay, master!" If it involved fighting, Goku was happy.

Tails was sweat-dropping a bit at the idea of Goku, who he'd seen smash walls with his fists, throwing punches at him, but Master Roshi had words for him.

"Miles, learn well. They may seem simple, but they will help you to be a better fighter. As your body becomes stronger, and your martial arts skills improve, you will find your reserves of ki will grow, and so will your ability to manipulate it."

He turned to the lake. "Now, on with your strength training! Since you've been sweating so much, you'll do a nice 10 laps of the lake."

There was a sigh of relief from the trio at the comparatively easy task. As they stripped off and swam out into deeper water, he added.

"Oh, and watch out for the shark."

"Shark!" The three exclaimed in unison.

A fin, attached to a shark only slightly smaller than a medium passenger jet, rose out of the water. All three made their laps at Olympic speed, Tails having to use some additional tail spinning to keep up. When they finally staggered out of the water and collapsed on the shore, Master Roshi nodded.

"Good, that's your strength training done for today."

Kurilin finally hauled himself to his feet, and gasped out, "So we'll be doing the training we did today, every day?"

"Oh no, today was just a warm up. From now on, for the next eight months, you'll be doing today's training but with a 20 kilogram turtle shell on your back." He held out one identical to the one he was wearing. "Now do you see why they call me the Turtle master?"

# Tails of Hard Training

## Chapter 5 - Tails of hard training.

The next seven months passed in a montage... (Music: 'Believe in myself' - Tails Theme from Sonic Adventures [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=TBNq1jZOuRg](https://youtube(dot)com/watch?v=TBNq1jZOuRg) . Not having the skill to do a matching animation, each present tense section is the visuals for the part of the song lyrics above it.)

*When all alone in my chair, I just go about wishing*

*Wanna be strong, Really wanna be trusted*

Tails is sitting on a chair next to his bed, which is just a futon unrolled in the main room of the Kame House, Bulma's computer in hand. He stops reading and looks over at the only decoration, a hand drawn picture of Sonic and the other Freedom Fighters, pinned to a piece of board that acts as a frame. After a moment he sniffs and has to wipe his eyes. Then he shuts off the computer and lays himself down to sleep.

*When all alone in my bed, I just go about yearning*

*Wanna be cool, I also wanna be like him*

Tails is flying alongside Sonic over hill and dale, through the streets of Robotropolis, effortlessly blasting through ranks of Swat-bots. They make a ringing sound as they fall down, but it's the alarm bell of the clock waking him for the 4:30 am milk run, or rather milk marathon (whoever said milk runs were supposed to be easy never did this one!).

*But that's not something I can do so easily*

*This is not simply my way, my own style*



*Gotta get a hold of my life*

Tails runs along behind Goku and Kurilin, clearly straining to keep up, but not asking for any breaks or to slow down. Despite the strain, he pulls the effort needed to carry on from some deep reserve inside himself, even as he jogs up the rock staircase. He's dressed in a loose top and trouser, just like the others, except for the tail hole, but he's not using his tails to assist himself, despite the evident strain.

*I wanna fly high*

*So I can reach the highest of all the heavens*

His initial attempt to swim the lake with a turtle shell on is even worse, for as soon as he pushes off, he sinks to the bottom like a stone, and has to drive himself back up on his tails, flying up above the water like a Polaris missile. He then has to use them to in propeller mode keep his head above water as he swims.

*Somebody will be,*

*waiting for me so,*

*I have got to fly higher*

Running around in a hard-hat, pushing wheel-barrows, digging furrows with his bare hands, wading through quick sand on the milk run, dodging hornets and sharks and a hungry T-Rex, all these push him to his limits, and slightly beyond, but he never backs off, though he does collapse face first in his bed every night, too exhausted to do much more than glance at his picture, let alone cry about it. But he does look, and this time it's more an expression of determination, and a silent promise..

*When all alone in my sleep, I just go about dreaming*

*I see myself there, having the same adventure*

Once again Tails is there beside Sonic and the other freedom fighters, surrounded by scrap metal that was once Swat-bots and defying Robotnik to his face. The face changes to Goku, as Tails wakes up, looking worried as he helps peel Tails off the rock he'd been flung against from an over-enthusiastic throw.

*If I just follow you, I will never see the light*

*Now is the time to find my way through this life*

*I'm trying so hard to be strong*

Kurilin is standing there, shaking his head, and waves to a log at one side of the area they're training in, next to the salt water lake, indicating he should rest. Tails shakes his head, wincing slightly as he does so, and lines up alongside Goku, ready to watch Kurilin demonstrate the next move. Despite clearly being tired and sore and the worse for wear, he keeps repeating the moves until he has them perfect.

*I've gotta keep goin'*

*Everything is a brand new challenge for me*

*and I will believe, believe in myself*

*This is the only way for me*

His dream is now about reliving the fight on top of the dimensional cannon carrier, but rather than just diving between the robots' legs, he actually dives into one, knocking it off balance and ducking the blaster shots of the others as he swings the one around, ripping off a back panel, shorting wires and triggering the robot's hand weapon to blast the other two.

The background ringing of alarms is once again the ringing of the clock, announcing another day of torturous training, but on the run, he's no longer quite so strained, though he's still working hard. His

arms, legs and chest show more definition through his clothes, and a growth spurt has given him a couple of extra inches of height. The turtle shell on his back no longer seems to weigh him down as much, and he's keeping pace with the other two far more easily.

### *Instrumental*

Kurilin, Tails and Goku are sitting cross legged on a ridge overlooking the island, meditating in the twilight. The bald headed ex-monk is clearly now taking his responsibility seriously.

Kurilin suddenly flares a slight yellow battle aura around himself, while Tails has one that starts as luminous golden tongues of flame flickering around the tips of his tails, like a pair of candles. Goku, on the other hand, is simply asleep, head resting to one side and with a bubble of snot expanding from his nose. Cue a sweat-drop from the others when they notice.

The sparring area, and once again, Tails is flung into the same rock wall, but this time he tumbles in mid air to land feet first against it and spring off, back into the fray with a look of determination on his face. He lands in front of Goku in a ready stance, and starts attacking. While Goku is easily defending, it's clear that Tails is actually making him work for it. Then Kurilin stops them and points out holes in their stances and techniques.

*Many friends help me out, in return I help them*

*Certain things I can do and there are things that only I can do*

*No one's alone!*

The three trainees are bounding along on their morning milk run, racing across the huge chasm, when the log slips at one end and falls away into the depths. As the other two fall, Tails powers up his tail propulsion and dives after them, catching each of them by the scruff of their training clothes, then reverses thrust and helicopters

them still in their turtle shells and carrying their milk crates, to the other side.

With Tails to fly down, all three to lift, and some rope from the friendly householder, they quickly haul the tree trunk back up, and Tails sketches out how to secure it so the bridge won't fall again. Goku punches out a seating for it into the bare rock with his fists, Kurilin does the same on the far side, and Tails uses his spinning tails as a circular saw to shape the ends of the log to fit.

*I wanna fly high*

*So I can reach the highest of all the heavens*

*Somebody will be,*

*waiting for me so,*

*I have got to fly higher*

Back in the sparring area, someone's just been flung into the rock again, but this time it's Goku. Pan back to the centre of the area where Tails is standing in a posture which indicated he threw the punch that did it, with a slight golden flame aura guttering out around him, and an utterly stunned expression on his face. Goku bounds back in, grinning.

Tails starts to smile back and slides into a ready stance. Rather than acting as sensei, Kurilin joins them, and the three go into a free-form, three way sparring match, running and bouncing about as if the heavy turtle shells on their backs aren't there. Goku is the strongest, Tails the fastest, and Kurilin is the sneakiest, though Tails makes shameless use of his flying ability to get the high ground.

*Instrumental Coda*

More scenes, the trio doing the milk run at a dead run, Tails outrunning the other two without any tail propeller assist, though his

tail tips are showing a slight battle aura. They are three ploughing furrows in the field at a speed a mechanical digger would have trouble matching, as an astounded farmer looks on.

Tails hovering over the building site, positioning a girder while Kurilin and Goku drive in the rivets with their bare fists. The other workers stand there goggling at the sight. All three swimming laps at hydrofoil speed in the salt water lake while a shark, with a massive band aid on its nose, sulks at the other end.

*Spoken: Will Believe...*

Now Tails goes to bed in the evening, looks at his picture of Sonic, Sally and the others and smiles, before going to sleep.

At the end of the montage... I mean seven months, Goku ran yelling into the Kame House, where Master Roshi and Launch were eating ice cream.

"Hey, old timer! Hey, turtle guy!"

Master Roshi finished his ice cream (it was good ice cream, no sense wasting it) and said, with infinite dignity. "Eh, what's up?"

"C'mon! You gotta come quick!"

As he followed the youngster, the Turtle master asked what this was about, but Goku didn't answer. Instead he led the old hermit to the edge of the salt water lake, and a massive boulder.

"So, a boulder? What about it?"

Tails and Kurilin were there too, Kurilin beaming, and Tails practically jumping up and down in excitement. It was Kurilin who spoke.

"Invincible master, we can move it now!"

Goku had already stepped up and put his hands against the rock.

"Looka this!"

Master Roshi exclaimed, "You don't mean..."

With a mighty growl, and an expression of great effort, he drove forward, and the boulder, the size of a large house, moved with him. After pushing it a few feet, he stepped back, gasping and dripping sweat from the effort.

While the Turtle Master was standing there, gazing on in utter shock, barely hidden by his sun glasses, Kurilin took his turn. "I can't move it as far, but... Hrrrr!"

He was as good as his word. Finally Tails took his place. A golden battle aura flared up in his tails and spread to engulf his body as he set his gloved palms against the rock. His tails twisted tightly, and then spun, driving a small hurricane of air out behind him as he also pushed forward with both legs. The rock moved a few feet.

He quickly stopped, breathing heavily, and spoke between gasps. "Whoo... I have to use my tails to get extra thrust for this one... whoo... but I can push that smaller one easily, without even focussing my ki, whoo... Goku managed this almost a month ago... hahhh... but he wanted to wait until we could all do it before showing you."

Goku had recovered, and asked. "Okay, so now will you teach us your fighting moves?"

"Okay... Not bad... not bad at all..." Master Roshi was still recovering himself. 'And here I thought I was joking about being able to move that thing!' he thought.

Back in front of the Kame House, he levelled with the three.

"To be honest boys, there's not much else I can teach you. All the basics of the Kame-sennin Martial arts School are incorporated in the training you've been doing every day. You may not realise it, but your bodies have been forged like steel swords. Martial Art is merely

the application of those abilities. From here, you must train yourselves using the foundation you have built."

"On the path of budo, one strives not to defeat an opponent, but to avoid defeating one's own self. In the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, do not be seduced by the improbable dream of winning, instead, take it as an opportunity to test your abilities and further focus your training."

"But you must have some special techniques..." Kurilin asked, disappointed.

"That is the point, they are techniques I developed for my use. Even if you could master them in the month you have left, they would not best fit your abilities. Worse, they might stop you developing techniques yourself that will perfectly fit your capabilities. Like a hand-me down pair of shoes, that are a size too small. In this next month, I suggest you work on developing such techniques. Other than that, continue what you've been doing already..."

He reached round behind himself, and brought out three more turtle shells. "... except you're going to be wearing a turtle shell that's twice as heavy as before."

There was a mass face fault in response.

Another month passed, and more intense training. Finally the day came when they finally were ready to go to Southern Metropolis island where the 21st Tenka'ichi Budo'kai was held. At long last the trio were allowed to take off their turtle shell weight, as Master Roshi de-capsuled and loaded the car to take them to the airport.

"Gosh, that's a relief..." Tails unslung his shell with a sigh of relief.

Kurilin nodded as he laid down his shell. "Yeah, it would have been a little embarrassing, going out in public... whoa!" He waved his arms, trying to keep his balance.

"Hey, it's like my body's so light, I can't feel my own weight!" Goku exclaimed, making a tiny hop.

The Turtle Master looked on. "Try jumping as high as you can."

All three crouched, and sprang into the air... and kept on going. Several hundred feet up, they started to slow down.

"It's like we're flying!" Goku yelled out.

Tails grinned back. "Uh huh, you're just jumping. This is flying!" His tails span up, and he started to circle the others at high speed as they fell. "Power dive!" He drove straight for the floor, flipping end for end and screeching to a halt on his spinning tails just before impact. The other two landed at terminal velocity, and barely had to bend their knees to absorb the impact.

After the three of them had some fun racing around at near hedgehog speeds and generally having fun, they finally got underway. Master Roshi had gotten each of them a new suit, a loose orange one piece fighting suit with a blue belt, and a black and yellow patch with the symbol for Kame, Turtle on the back and right breast.

Tails also wore the white gloves and red and white boots he'd worn that day he'd arrived. While he now had others, the almost indestructible Mobian synthetics they were made of would stand up to almost any punishment, plus they were a link to home, and what he hoped to achieve.

On the tri-motor passenger plane, Master Roshi goosed the stewardess. Goku was goggling out the window, amazed that the big metal thing could fly, if more slowly than Kinto'un. Tails was geeking out at the archaic technology, since this was the first time he'd seen a propeller driven aircraft, rather than actually being one. Kurilin had his head in a newspaper, radiating 'I have nothing to do with these three weirdos' rays with furious intensity.



Tails didn't spend all his time obsessing over the aircraft, though he'd have loved to get a look at the cockpit. The rest of the time he was once again muzzle deep in Bulma's pocket computer, studying. While he'd often been able to use the hour a day allotted by Master Roshi to lessons for self study, and in the later months had enough energy left at the end of the day to do some reading before going to sleep, he was still catching up on a local high school equivalent education in most areas.

The exception, of course, was maths, physical sciences and technology, where he was well up to university level. The synergy with what tutoring he'd already gotten from Nicole had helped him leap ahead. He'd also found himself thinking in new ways over the last eight months. He'd always wanted more chances to make his own decisions, and he'd finally had chance.

He'd been the one to decide to stick to the training, no matter how hard it had been at first. More than that, the others had expected him to motivate himself. While Master Roshi had set the tasks, and Kurilin had trained him in techniques, it hadn't felt the same as Sally or even Sonic telling him what to do. For the first time in his life he'd been treated as an equal, a junior to be true, with things to learn, but not a minor.

Despite the fact that the others had been there to help when he needed it, he'd had to learn self-reliance, and it felt good. And there had been occasions where he'd been able to contribute to the other two's training, and had his suggestions listened to, and that had felt even better. He was ready for this new challenge, and eager.

Of course, convincing the staff of the Tenka-ichi Budo-kai of the Turtle trio's readiness was rather harder. Fortunately entrance to the competition only required the entry fee, which was steep enough to discourage casual contestants, but which they had available from their months of construction and farm work.

However, the repeated incredulity of the registration clerk and the attendants at the competition hall at the three youngsters being

competitors and not spectators made all three a bit nervous. When they actually got inside and found over a hundred mean, tough and generally massive martial artists that nervousness increased.

"Eessh! These are the other contestants?" Goku asked.

Kurilin gulped. "I'm starting to think we might have rushed this a bit..."

Tails shook his head. "No! Master Roshi believed we were ready. He wouldn't have let us wear his badge if he thought we'd embarrass him. So let's live up to the uniform. We're here to test ourselves and do our best, not to win." He held out one hand, now wearing his old gloves. Goku put his hand on top immediately, and after a moment's hesitation, so did Kurilin.

"Heh! Just as well! You three shrimps won't last a minute!" A sneering voice intruded on their conversation. A pair of monks came up, one tall, and one wide with a nasty moustache hanging on his lip like a furry slug. They were both wearing the same style of gi as Kurilin had worn when he arrived at Turtle island.

The tall one had spoken, because the other one exclaimed in a different voice. "Well, if it isn't Kurilin! How long is it since you ran away crying from Orin Temple?"

Kurilin had the expression of a stunned rabbit in the path of a steam roller. "Gleep!"

The tall one patted his head familiarly. "Huh! You can't be here for the contest, you have zero potential."

"That's not true!" Tails exclaimed, rounding on them. "Kurilin taught me all I know about martial arts techniques. He's an great martial artist, and a great teacher!"

Wide-boy smirked. "It speaks? I thought it was stuffed! Listen plushie-boy, if Kurilin taught you all he knows about martial arts, it

must have been a dull 10 seconds. Maybe I'll get to fight you, I could use a new loofah."

The pair chuckled at the weak witticism. Under normal circumstances Kurilin would have responded with a sickly grin and an uncomfortable laugh, hoping to avoid further trouble. But they'd turned their attention onto Tails. The young fox had been an eager student, despite the punishing work out Master Roshi's training had given all of them, and Goku had deferred to him too.

It had felt good to be listened to, and he was proud, both of how Tails had improved, and that he had been the one to accomplish it. Plus it gave him a good feeling for someone to call him sensei and mean it. Now these two were sneering at his efforts, and his first student.

"Back off! Leave him alone!" He was surprised to find himself saying.

The tall one smirked. "Or you'll what?"

Kurilin was mad enough at them to answer back. "I don't need to do anything, Tails can handle both of you! I just don't want your ugly pussies putting him or me off our form! It's not like you'd ever use a loofah anyway."

Nasty moustache growled, good humour gone. "Big words from a little punk!"

Kurilin was about to respond, when the announcer started to call for attention to explain the rules of the contest, and the two goons decided to move away to listen. "See you brats later, on the way to the hospital!" Lanky called over his shoulder.

Tails was bristling, and Goku was frowning. "They didn't seem very nice."

The little fox responded. "They weren't just 'not nice', they were mean!"

Kurilin looked depressed, brief spurt of defiance gone. "Those two were always bullying me back at Orin temple. Man, what am I going to do?"

"Hit 'em with all you got!" exclaimed Goku. "They didn't look so tough."

"But they are! They were two of the top senior students at the temple. Kashu, the tall one, is a 7th dan, and Waru, the big guy, is 6th." Kurilin groused. "Maybe they're right, I should give up..."

Tails had been thinking, fast. Those guys had hurt his sensei, and his friend. Tails knew how much someone denying your ability could hurt. But where the other Freedom Fighters had been genuinely worried, and trying to protect him (and to be fair, looking back on how he got here, they might have had a small point) those guys had done it because they could. How would Sonic handle this? Race over there and humiliate them for hurting his friend... which would probably get him disqualified.

Much as he hated to admit it, this wasn't a time for Sonic thinking. Those two meanies had struck a hit on Kurilin's self confidence, his belief that he could fight, and Sonic wouldn't understand that, because, just like Goku, they never seemed to have come up against something they couldn't handle. Darn it, Goku's reply had shown he didn't understand.

Aunt Sally would plan a more subtle come-uppance for those goons, but Aunt Bunny would be most likely to comfort the victim. It was time for Bunny thinking, to help Kurilin get his confidence back, at least some. He'd thought this all through in a fraction of a second, before he spoke.

"Why are you giving their assessment so much weight? They haven't seen you fight in over a year. Besides, Master Roshi didn't send us here to win, just to test our skills. As long as we do our best, I'm sure he'll be satisfied. About the only way to let everyone down would be not to try. I know you can do it. Goku does too, right?"

Goku might not have thought it through, but he was happy enough to agree. "Yeah! You're gonna be great!"

They quieted down as the announcer explained the qualifiers. There were four mats, and 139 contestants split up into four blocks, from which a total of eight would go to the finals. The matches would be one minute, single elimination bouts, with the winner decided by ring out, knocking the other guy unconscious, or them pleading for mercy. If the fight went to a minute, the judges would decide who won. Killing your opponent or using a weapon would lead to disqualification.

The trio stood in line and went up to pick their numbers from a box, written on slips of paper. Goku got 70, Kurilin 93, both in block three, which made Kurilin freak a bit, until it became clear they were in different halves. He didn't want to fight Goku before the finals.

Tails got 136, which meant he was in block four, and the last of the Turtle students go. To Kurilin's dismay, tall, bald and ugly had 94, and wide boy got 135, which put them against Kurilin and Tails respectively. When Kashu overheard this, he was all smiles.

"Hey, Kurilin, just promise you won't hurt me too bad!" He called out as he swaggered over to the mat.

Tails decided it might be time for some Sally style thinking, in short, a cunning plan, so cunning, you could put a tail on it and call it a fox, which meant he had a double dose.

He asked Kashu, "Kurilin-sensei has told me you're senior martial artists at Orin temple. So, do you carry iron girders, drive in hot rivets with your bare hands and push thousand ton boulders around?"

The guy smirked. "Yeah, sure I do kid."

"Wow! So you must have fought lots of guys who do that kind of thing too, like Kurilin-sensei."

The tall monk looked surprised, then sneered. "Nice try kid, but you're not going to psych me out with such a feeble attempt. No-one can do that stuff."

Tails shrugged. "Gosh, I guess you're too smart for me." As he headed off to watch Goku, Tails passed Kurilin and gave him a grin. The young monk was standing there stunned, then realised what Tails had actually been up to, and grinned back, looking happy for the first time since he'd found out who his first opponent was.

**Authors Notes:** Dragonball purists will be enraged at the liberties I've taken with the actual sequences of events, yes, the position drawing was before they met up with the two goons in the original, and the Turtle students were wearing proper suits, not their training gear for the plane flight. Put it down to a variation in crowd movements and that with three people to outfit Master Roshi had to economise somewhere. And the two goons were never named in canon, but considering Kurilin's name is a Japanese pun on 'chestnut', I feel no guilt at naming the others Kashu (cashew nut) and Waru (Walnut).

Also there's the fact that I've had Tails develop a lot over the chapter. Sorry, but it was eight months, and I stand by my idea that he would be treated as more of an equal by Goku and Kurilin than the older freedom fighters. After all, they've seen him grow up, where as the Dragonball duo haven't.

I'm not saying that the Freedom Fighters are mean to him, or are deliberately keeping him down, but by taking care of him, they would provide less opportunity, or need for Tails to take care of himself. Freed from that constraint, and given his frequently demonstrated determination and canon intellect, he should flower very rapidly.

He still makes decisions and plans in terms of the others' traits. Tactical, combat oriented thinking is Sonic, strategic, long range planning is Sally, and emotional, socially oriented thinking is Bunny.

# Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 1

## Chapter 6 - Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 1

Goku faced off against a massive mountain of a man, with a bald head, handlebar moustache, and a circus strongman style bodysuit. He glared down at Goku, and in a thick accent declaimed, "What ees theese? There ees no joy een crushing soch an ant!"

"Oh yeah..." Goku might not have been the focus of Tails' lessons, but he'd gotten into a few new habits, so he put his hands together and gave a slight bow before taking a stance.

As the referee called the start, Goku dashed forward at a blurring speed, dived under the strongman's legs, and stopped behind him. As the big body builder looked around frantically for where he'd gone, Goku tapped him on the back of the leg, purely to alert him. The big man collapsed forward, off the edge of the mat.

"V... victory... number 70!" the stunned announcer exclaimed.

There were rumblings of how the kid was lucky his opponent had tripped... yeah tripped, that was all.

"Note Goku standing there looking at his finger with surprise. Note the guy recovering and clutching the back of his leg in pain." Tails said to Kurilin as they watched. "I don't think they're right." He wanted to reinforce the seed he'd planted earlier.

"You heard that guy from Orin temple. He didn't think our training was possible. I guess that means he hasn't done it after all. I think if you go all out, you'll really hurt him. I'm sure you can defeat him without much trouble, so please don't go overboard."

"93, 94 to the ring!" the announcer called.

Kurilin was still a bit uncertain. The idea that the tables had turned was still new to him. "I hope you're right. Well here it comes..."

As he saw the young monk clamber up onto the raised mat, Kashu sneered. "At least I get to play with my little friend again."

His crony chuckled. "Heh heh heh, to bad you didn't get a real opponent!"

Despite Tails' morale boost, Kurilin was not happy, but he decided to suck it up, knowing Tails was watching, and not wanting to disappoint his first student. He took a stance and waited.

"Let's go!" The taller monk dashed forward throwing in a straight punch to Kurilin's with all the finesse of a wrecking ball, making an audible whip crack in the air. But Kurilin wasn't there. Months of hard training against the speed of Tails and the strength of Goku had sharpened his reflexes to the point that he easily evaded the lightning attack, by jumping over it, and Kashu too.

Combat reflexes took over, and even as the other monk realised his target was gone, and turned to look for him, Kurilin was landing, and turned it into a flying side kick that blasted through the other's hastily raised block like it wasn't there and sunk deep into the older monk's abdomen, causing his eyes to bug out in a comical manner.

His wasn't the only pair of eyes in the training hall to bug out as Newton had his say with good old action and reaction, and Kashu went flying out of the ring. However, Kurilin had felt how easily his kick went through the block, and mindful of Tails' suggestion, pulled it slightly, so rather than flying clean across the dojo and through of the far wall, the tall monk only landed on the far side of the next combat area.

The referee sweat-dropped. "Uh... victory to 93!"

Goku had joined Tails at the ringside. As Kurilin jumped down he said, "Told ya! The old timer's training made us real strong without us



even knowing it!"

The monk was still looking a bit stunned. "Yeah... No foolin'!"

Tails nodded. "I figured it out when I saw Goku take down that guy with a finger. It's just like he told us, his training was designed to push us beyond normal human limits."

"135, 136 to block 4!" came the call.

Tails jumped up onto the arena to face Kurilin's other ex-tormentor, who looked slightly less cocky.

"Just because shorty managed to pull off some kind of fluke, doesn't mean you're anything special." Waru growled.

Tails suddenly realised he could pay him back for his earlier comments about Kurilin, without doing anything but telling the truth. "Well, I only started training in martial arts eight months ago, so I'm not as skilled as he is."

The guy grinned nastily. "So you're a beginner? Well don't expect any mercy from me. If I accidentally turn you into a rug, it's your own fault for playing with the big boys." His tone indicated he was looking forward to it.

Tails merely shrugged, and bowed slightly, white gloved hands together. As he came out of it into a stance, Waru dived in without letting him get himself set. Tails tried to jump away, but was caught in mid-air. Kurilin's old nemesis had clearly decided that giving him room to manoeuvre was a bad idea, which was right, as far as it went.

Tails was caught in a bear hug which, from the pressure the other was exerting, was clearly intended to squeeze the life, or at least the breath, out of him, allowing him to then be demolished at the other's leisure. Unfortunately for the monk, Tails wasn't that easy to crush. Months of being slammed into walls and taking ever increasing

strikes from Goku had toughened his body to the point where the monk's attentions felt like a friendly hug.

He brought his hands together below his belt, and drove them upwards, pushing his elbows out like a car jack folding, and driving Waru's arms apart. He flicked his tails up to smash on his opponents knuckles, and the monk lost his grip.

Tails took no time in using the monk's belt at a temporary foot hold, boosting himself upwards whilst the other red and white boot slammed into the man's jaw. Waru's head snapped back, eyes glazing, while Tails back-flipped away, then sprung up to arc over the other, somersaulting forward to grab the shoulders or the monk's gi, and letting himself drop down back to back with him.

His tails splayed to either side as he brought his feet up behind him, arching his back so they slammed into the small of the monk's back, then activated the very lowest level Tail-spin attack he could muster, tails swinging round backwards like paddle-wheels. It drove him forwards, the centre of the wheel, and hauled the monk with him.

Waru was slammed down onto his front on the mat, while Tails ascended. In mid-air he made a decision and dropped, landing with both feet on the monk's back, driving what little breath remained out of him. From that position, he could have performed a flying elbow drop, but he'd been worried it would break the monk's spine.

Instead he simply jumped off, turned to face him, and waited. The referee started counting, as Waru desperately tried to regain his breath. On the count of eight, he managed to draw a great gulping breath into his lungs, and staggered to his feet halfway through the ten.

He glared furiously at the young fox. "Who are you?"

"Miles 'Tails' Prower, student of the Turtle Master school of martial arts."

There were gasps and muttering from the martial artists watching the match. It appeared a lot of people had heard of Muten Roshi. Words like 'Invincible' and 'Legendary' were being tossed around. Waru blanched. "But I thought you said Kurilin taught you!"

He was obviously playing for time, looking for an opening, but at the moment Tails had to be leading on points, so Waru was the one who'd have to act to win.

"Kurilin was my sensei, he was made an assistant instructor on the second day of training by Master Roshi, because of his skills." That should finish off any pretension by those two that they were any better than Kurilin.

It was time to finish this. Tails blurred forward, finally cranking out some real speed, and dropped low, landing on one foot and spinning into a low tail sweep that swept the monk's feet out from under him before he even knew there was an attack. He dove under the falling monk, caught him as he fell, and threw him out of bounds, where he sprawled semi-conscious on the floor.

"Victory to 136! Ring out!" called the referee.

Tails bowed to his opponent, then turned to where Goku had joined Kurilin at the ringside. Goku was whopping, and Kurilin was beaming, and not just from the lights on his forehead. Tails bowed to him, a gesture of respect, and then, grinned widely and punched the air.

As Tails jumped down, Goku asked, "Why did you take so long to finish him?"

The young fox shrugged. "I'm not used to being the stronger fighter in a fight. I wanted to calibrate my attacks against someone weaker, so I don't accidentally cripple someone. Besides, Master Roshi said to consider this training, and how much training will I get if I just blast straight through? Did I do good?"

Kurilin nodded happily. "You did great!"

They saw the two monks being carted out on stretchers. Kurilin called out to them as they went past. "Heh, looks like you guys were right, we are seeing you again on the way to the hospital!"

The other contestants had started to notice the three now, finally connecting the Turtle symbol on their outfits with the Turtle school. Not that it made much difference, the three friends continued as they'd started, blazing their way up the board.

Goku's next opponent, a black boxer fell to a swift kick to the jaw, while Kurilin was slammed into the ground by a rock crushing kick attack and elbow drop when he glanced away to acknowledge a "Good luck!" from Goku and Tails. Not that it phased him, he might as well have been in a pillow fight for all the damage it did. He just sprung back up, dusted himself off, fixed the other contestant with a glare, and offered to counter-attack. The opponent immediately dived behind the referee, screaming 'Mercy' like a little girl.

Tails got a tiger, who managed to be dismissive of the small vulpine, stating he should see how a real predator fights. It turned out that a real predator fights poorly when someone grabs their tail, slams them back and forth on the mat, and then tosses them out of the ring like a hammer thrower.

But the opponents were getting better as they approached the fourth round, the one that would actually place them in the top eight. Goku's next opponent actually forced him into evading with a high jump, putting up a spirited defence before Goku got in low and dropped him with a leg sweep, and flung the downed man out of the ring by the legs.

Kurilin's final fight was against a massive bear who was clearly bruin trouble for the young monk. The bear was all claws, and launched a nasty flurry of swiping attacks as Kurilin faded backwards. He let the bear tire himself out before bounding inside and delivering a

roundhouse kick to his jaw. And the bear became a yogi, or at least was enlightened... of his front teeth.

Tails was the worse off of the trio, as chance had him fighting five matches. To make up the numbers, eleven initial pairs, chosen at random, had an extra match, and 135/136 had been one of the unlucky ones. However, he'd taken it philosophically, it was after all, just extra training, and that was good, wasn't it?

The first was one of the biggest guys there, a wrestler with huge shorts and a frizzy Afro hairdo. His hands alone were as bigger than Tails' head, but Tails just bowed, and stood ready.

"Cocky, aren't you?" The big guy asked. "Maybe I should squeeze it out of you!"

"It's been tried already." Tails replied, truthfully.

"Not by me!" His hands snapped out, one above the other, seeking to grab the fox in his grip. He'd clearly either watched, or heard about the earlier matches because Tails had simply jumped up as before, the upper hand, which was cupped over him, would have caught him.

But Tails, even before training, had the reflexes and co-ordination to keep up with a cruising Sonic, so he recognised the trap before most other people would have even realised there was an attack, and hopped up onto the wrist of the wrestler's lower hand. He wasted no time running up the relatively broad highway of the guy's arm to his shoulder, where he launched a heel drop strike to the back of the wrestler's head.

The big guy staggered forward, arms pin-wheeling, and Tails thought he'd won, but if not faked, it was at least partly a feint. One of the 'pin-wheeling' hands slapped down at tails as if striking at a mosquito. Tails was fast enough to dive away, but not fast enough to stop the massive man grabbing his tails.

The wrestler shook his head to clear it, but also held Tails out in front of him and shook the fox by the tails like a rat. But now he was underestimating the fox. The Tail-spin techniques Tails had developed based on Sonic's buzz saw, required him to keep his focus, and keep down his lunch at massive RPMs. The transient accelerations from this were low compared to that.

Tails decided he had to show at least some of what he was capable of, twisting his tails up as a golden glow formed around him, and un-twirling them at masonry drill speeds, with much the same effect on the wrestler as if he'd been holding a spinning drill bit. "Prower drill driver!"

If Tails had shaped the ki forming around his tails into aerofoil shapes, the guy would have lost fingers. As it was, he just lost his grip. Tails reached out and grappled the hand, wrapping arms and legs around it like a koala on a tree trunk, and cranking up his first near full power Tailspin attack of the day.

The result was similar to his first fight, but far more impressive. The whole mass of the guy simply flipped over backwards, and slammed down on his back into the arena floor. This time, Tails was certain the guy could take it, and instantly power dived down with an elbow strike to the solar plexus.

The ten count was a formality, the wrestler was out of it, but Tails watched carefully against him playing possum, then bowed to him when the referee called, "The victory goes to number 136!"

Once again he followed it up by punching the air, it just felt right somehow. He noticed Goku and Kurilin were at the ring-side and had been joined by a taller teenager wearing a headband, and a Chinese style outfit with an embroidered symbol on the torso.

The referee and attendants were having trouble moving his erstwhile opponent out of the arena, so Tails helped by dead-lifting the body and carting it to the edge where he jumped down, still carrying it, and laid it down. Then he went over to the others.

"One more to go! That guy was tough!"

"Aw... you had him beat from the start!" Goku replied, then introduced the newcomer. "Tails, this is Yamcha."

Tails thought for a moment then remembered. "The desert bandit from the Dragon ball hunt!"

The young man, looked rather embarrassed, one hand behind his neck. "Yeah, but not any-more. I've been living in West city, going out with Bulma, and training for the Tenka-ichi Budo-kai."

Tails frowned, not in anger but in puzzlement. "We were just there... eight months ago, gosh I guess I didn't realise how much time had passed. Bulma didn't say anything..."

"Uh, I was away at the time, but I heard about you when I got back. She was quite impressed with your engineering skills, it sounds like." He grinned. "It's just as well she doesn't like younger men, looks like you made quite a hit. "

"I'd never hit a girl!" Tails exclaimed, "And certainly not Bulma after she's been so nice to me, and gave me all that neat stuff."

Kurilin swatted him around the back of the head. "Idiot! He means you made a good impression."

Tails mused. "Well if you hit something you would make an impression, just how good would depend on the strength of the impact, and the relative hardness and ductility of the impactor and impacted surface..."

Kurilin rolled his eyes. "Forget it!"

"Well if you want to see her again, she, Oolong and Puar are right here at the tournament to cheer me on." Yamcha stated, snickering at the by-play.

"129 and 136, report to the block 4 arena!", came the call from behind them.

"I'd like that!" Tails said, "But first I've gotta finish this fight."

Yamcha nodded. "I've been watching you three, heard you were all training under the Turtle Master. I'm not sure I can win against any of you, from what I've seen you guys are at a whole different level."

Tails bounded up onto the mat and shrugged, deprecatingly. "We've trained hard, but we're just here to test our skills against tough opponents. We're not here to win, just do our best."

He didn't hear Yamcha mutter, "Man, even placing looks iffy..."

He turned to face his opponent, who didn't look at all tough. She was tall with styled purple hair, make-up, and all the right bits in all the right places. She was also wearing a blue sleeveless top and tight jeans that made sure you knew she did.

"Hiya, cutie! I'm Ran Fan, who are you?"

"Tails Prower, I mean Miles..." Tails hadn't realised he'd be facing a girl.

"Be gentle with me, 'kay?" She had one hand up to her cheek, and was looking over it coyly at him.

While he was still too young to get the full impact of her act, he'd realised he'd be hitting a girl, which was bad. That had been ingrained in him right from when he was born, by Sonic, Sally and Bunny, and it had taken deep hold.

The programming conflict was bad enough that when the referee started the match, he didn't simply evade as she dived in with a flying jump kick. It slammed into his side, staggering him as he wasn't properly set, and as she spun round behind him, she had chance to launch a vicious double fist strike into the back of his neck.



Fortunately, he could take it, though it had staggered him for a second, and the finishing knee to the face as she completed her circle round to the other side missed, as he finally got his act together and jumped back, straightening up, and momentarily wrong footing her as her knee overshot.

On pure training, he counter-attacked the off balance girl with a tail sweep, only to have her shriek, which made him pull his blow, and collapse in front of him, holding her leg.

"Ow! Ow! Ow! That really hurt!" she sobbed, balled hands in front of her eyes.

The referee even commented, "Amazing, contestant 136 has made 129 cry!"

Tails immediately stopped dead and walked forward, holding out his hand to help her up, "Ohmigosh! I'm sorry! I just wanted to knock you down, not..."

She was watching from behind her fists with a glint in her eye, and as soon as he was in range, one fist lashed out to slam into his stomach. Even as he bent with the blow, her other hand grabbed his, and she used both hands to haul him over her head, flinging him out of the ring.

Tails had only seconds to act. He hadn't wanted to use it in the preliminaries, but he had no choice. He spun up his tails, stopping himself dead in mid-air, and hovering in helicopter mode, just over the edge of the ring. Since it wasn't a ring out unless he landed outside the ring, he was still in the fight.

Ran Fan was standing up and goggling at the sight, and she wasn't the only one. Tails flew down, frowning. "I don't think you were hurt at all, you were just faking to give yourself an opening!"

"Are you angry at lil' old me?" She tried acting coquettish all over again, but he was unmoved. So she straightened up. She was ahead

on points right now.

"Gee, you think?" she replied, recovering some of her poise. "All's fair in love, martial arts, and the 50 million zeni first prize for this tournament."

Tails had finally managed to resolve his internal conflict. "I'm not here for the money, just to train, but I've decided to treat you as a fighter first and a girl second. After all, it may be wrong to hit girls, but it's even worse to refuse to fight a martial artist because you're afraid you might hurt them. That's like saying they're too weak to fight. So I'll fight you just as I would a guy from here-on out."

Ran Fan blanched. She'd seen his previous fight. Without a distraction she was doomed. What happened next could be considered a mutual cultural and social misunderstanding. Ran Fan had observed Tails' initial confusion at her act, and assumed it was for the usual reasons. No male of any humanoid species had ever been able to resist her charms.

She would never have thought a pre-pubescent would be fighting, and that his confusion was primarily moral rather than carnal. She knew Tails was a kid, but had assumed he was at least a teenager, and just short for his age. This made her next action eminently logical.

"Golly, I guess I'm licked..." With a single rapid motion, she stripped off her top and jeans, leaving herself clad in only a skimpy bra and panties that left nothing to the imagination. She posed. "Would you like to lick me?"

The effect on the spectators was everything she'd intended. Nose bleeds were almost universal, a few bad enough to require their sufferers off to the hospital for transfusions. The effect on Tails however...

Mobians wore clothing for decoration, protection or utility, for example to have some pockets available. Modesty wasn't a cultural

concept. Even Bunny only wore a leotard because she wanted to cover up how much of her body was robotised. While Tails had been pretty thoroughly acclimatised to the fact that people here, even furry ones, wore a full set of clothes, he hadn't had the cultural conditioning behind it.

Ran Fan's free show wouldn't have affected the kit anyway, but it was his lack of understanding that caused what happened next.

He landed in a ready stance, a look of puzzlement on his face that quickly gave way to comprehension. "Why... Oh, I see! Okay, if you need to take anything else off, I'll wait."

Tails instantly became the hero of every male within earshot and line of sight, those that were still conscious.

Ran Fan had never had a reaction like that, and it infuriated her. "Why you little perv!"

She dashed forward, intent on delivering pain. About three quarters of the way there, her rational mind caught up with her emotions. If it had been a cartoon, the action would have frozen, and she'd have pulled out a Wily E Coyote/Panda sign with the legend, 'In heavens name, what have I done?'

Tails had assumed the attack as signalling she was ready to resume, and dashed forward himself. He blurred under her, grabbing onto the only pieces of clothing she had left, and hefting her up. Turn around was definitely fair play in this case, as he tossed her out of the ring, though gently enough that she almost scraped the edge of the ring.

It was not his fault that the lingerie she was wearing wasn't designed for such structural stresses. It more or less disintegrated on impact leaving her altogether exposed, so to speak.

"Victory to number 136! Competitor 136 goes onto the final matches!"

Tails turned and bowed in the direction of his opponent's trajectory, then turned to face the others and punched the air with a massive grin. He wasn't expecting the massive cheer he received from the other martial artists in response. Looking somewhat bemused, he headed over to the Turtle students and friend.

"You were cool!" Goku exclaimed, "Now all of us get to go to the finals!"

"Was I even way past cool?" Tails asked longingly.

"Oh yeah!" Kurilin's eyes were slightly glazed, and he had red streaks underneath each nostril.

Yamcha had a tissue held over his nose. "The way you turned that strip tease act back on her..."

"Huh?" Tails looked non-nonplussed. "Anyone could have figured out she was either wearing weighted clothing, or that the clothes were binding her. So she wanted to get rid of them to allow her maximum freedom. Just because she'd been taking unfair advantage, doesn't mean I was going to do the same."

Kurilin goggled. "You mean, that why you said..."

"Of course, why else would I?"

"Uhhh..." The monk looked over at Yamcha, who was not going there, no-siree. "I'll explain later... a lot later." 'Maybe just before the next Tenka'ichi Budo'kai' He mentally added.

Ran Fan was carted away on a stretcher, properly covered, much to the disappointment of the old martial arts master Jackie Chun, who had assisted in giving first aid, though he'd been checking for pulses in some very odd places.

**Authors Notes:** Oh I know I'm going to get hammered on this one. Some people are going to complain that I'm waffling by showing the

other character's fights, others that I'm skimming things, both fights and other events. I'm trying to balance showing Tails himself being awesome, and his effect on the existing continuity. And yes, the first prize was 500,000 zeni, but I'm sorry, this is a world class event, a 5000 dollar first prize just doesn't cut it.

For that felt I needed to show his fights blow by blow, but I need the other characters fights shown, to give context to their interactions with him. And yes, Ran Fan originally made it to the final eight. And the fight I showed here was similar to her versus Namu in canon. The way I see it, she'd use the same tactics, so there would be similarity. In the revised version Tails takes her place in the finals. It's not just a stunning lack of imagination.

Obviously the plan is to have him able to kick tail at the level he does in Sonic 2 and Sonic 3. At the moment, he's about equal to Kurilin in strength, slightly less in skill about 2/3rds toughness. Where he comes into his own is his speed and special moves, which neither of the others can duplicate, yet, though Goku probably comes close in tactical movement speeds.

When Tails is pulling a Tail-spin technique, he's momentarily tougher than Goku, because he's unconsciously using his ki as a structural integrity field to reinforce his body against the insane forces he's generating, as well as to create an external saw blade/grinder outside himself. Basically, it's what he does in the side-scrolling games, that destroys robots and smashes through solid rock.

Likewise when he's moving at full speed, running or flying, he's also using ki to shield himself from the air stream, and accelerate his perceptions to the point where he doesn't crash into things. As for the fact that he manifests an aura at far lower power levels than normal, I say that's just a difference in physiology.

Both Tails and Sonic find it so easy to manipulate their ki that they spontaneously created special moves without training, or even understanding. So having visible battle aura leak out while they're

doing it makes sense. Look at Sonic's blue streak whenever he cranks up the velocity, it's even in the title song, for heavens sake!

Humans, on the other hand, have to learn a great deal of control before they can even manipulate ki, so they don't leak, unless they've learned to consciously manifest it, or they're insanely powerful, or powered up, and overflow. And I know in the games, they need an external power source, the Chaos Emeralds, to power up, or rings in SatAm, but the whole point is that the Turtle Master's training has allowed him to develop internal ki generating capacity and reserves.

At this moment, Tails is barely a third of the way up the Awesomeometer. He's not going to improve massively beyond this level in martial arts, but we still need to tick the boxes marked 'Ace Pilot' and 'Genius Engineer'. But that later, next, the finals!

# Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 2

## Chapter 7 - Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 2

There was a break before the final, and the trio raced off to find Master Roshi. He'd already found Bulma and the others.

"Oolong! Puar! Bulma!" Son Goku yelled out as he arrived, "Long time no see!"

"Goku?" asked Oolong the pig, joyfully, "You're competing right? Did you see Yamcha?"

"Sure did! Didn't recognise him with his hair short at first!"

Bulma focussed on the fox who arrived a few seconds later, firing off a machine gun burst of questions. "Tails? How are you? You managed to do the old geezer's training? Was it tough? Have you had time to study any of that stuff I gave you?"

Tails took a few seconds to catch up and answered, "Hi Miss Bulma! I'm fine, yes I did, and it was really tough,, but it worked, and I managed to set aside a couple of hours a day to study, but I'm still working at it. Thanks for the opportunity."

Bulma looked pleased, and Tails noticed Kurilin standing some way back from the group, so he dashed off and got him. "This is Kurilin, he's been training under Master Roshi too, and he taught me the martial arts basics too."

"Nice to meet you!" Kurilin said to the others.

"Ahem!" Master Roshi drew attention to himself. "So lads, how was it? Did you qualify?"

The trio looked at each other and grinned, but Goku was the one who spoke. "Yup! All three of us, and Yamcha too!"

"Banzai!" Puar exclaimed, followed closely by Oolong's, "He delivers as always." and Bulma's, "You are all so cool!"

"Well done, all of you! Good job." was Master Roshi's comment, and the one that got the biggest grins from the trio. They didn't have any more time, as the speakers called all the finalists back to the main martial arts hall, where the four mats had been cleared. There was the announcer who was a guy with sun glasses, a suit and wavy blond hair, and a couple of the ever-present assistant monks, as well as the finalists.

These comprised the three Turtle students, Yamcha, and four others. Jackie Chun was an old guy in a suit, with Colonel Sanders style hair and beard. Namu, was a lanky Indian guy with a turban and dhoti. Giran was the only other non-human, some sort of bulky humanoid dragon, with pterodactyl wings as well as clawed arms and feet, and a horn on his nose.

The final contestant qualified as barely human, a massive man in a pair of boxing trunks with a messy bread, even messier hair, and a stench that sent Goku and tails running to the far side of the room. Yamcha identified him as Bacterian, one of the strongest martial artists in the world, with an even more powerful stench developed from never having taken a bath in his life. It forced his opponents to hold their noses, rendering their arms useless for attacking.

The announcer called them up to select numbers again, to determine their starting positions. It came out as Kurilin versus Bacterian, Jackie Chun versus Yamcha, Tails versus Namu and Goku versus Giran. The contestants were to stay in the hall until called out onto the arena, a tiled square surrounded on three sides by a narrow lawn, and bleachers, and on the fourth side by the wall of the hall, and the entrance.

The announcer went out and introduced the competition, reminding every one that this was the first Tenka'ichi Budo'kai to be televised, and that the prize was 50 million zeni. After a word from the



presiding master of the martial arts dojo, an ancient looking bulldog, the word being 'Woof!' the first match started.

Kurilin was sent out with Goku and Tails' wishes of good luck ringing in his ears, somewhat nasally as both were holding their noses against the stink of Bacterian. The announcer introduced them to the crowd, and reminded them that ring out, crying for mercy, or being knocked down for a 10 count meant you lose.

Kurilin jumped well away from an initial attack, only to be felled by a deadly triple combo of Bacterian forcing Kurilin to smell his breath, scratching his crotch and waving the finger in front of Kurilin's face, and when this put the poor monk on the floor, twitching, bending over and farting on him.

The monk was down for the count, literally, and even Tails and Goku calling out for him to get up didn't help, until the count reached eight, and Goku realised something.

"Kurilin, think about it! He can't affect you!"

Tails eyes widened as he realised what Goku was on about. "Of course! Kurilin, you've got no nose!" The last was chorused with Goku, and it reached Kurilin's dazed consciousness.

"That's right!" On the ten, he sprang up, and took a stance, just beating the count. Now he just had to beat Bacterian.

The smelly martial artist attacked with phlem-fu, hoiking a loogie at the young monk that supposedly made elephants run in fear, but all it did to Kurilin was make him jump out of the way, then bound around to the side and launch a full power flying kick into the side of the big guy's head. To his credit, Bacterian simply went down, reeling, rather than unconscious, but Kurilin added insult to injury by jumping up on the guy's chest, bending over the other's face, and trumping his recovery with a trump of his own.

"M... mercy..."

The announcer called the win. "An amazing comeback victory for Kurilin! It appears that Bacterian could dish it out, but couldn't take it!"

Tails and Goku joined Kurilin on the edge of the ring to celebrate, as the crowd murmured approvingly. But when the trio looked out into the stands, they could see the one person they hoped was watching. Master Roshi was no-where to be seen.

The match between Jackie Chun and Yamcha looked equally uneven, the young tough martial artist versus the old man, who didn't even take a stance. And indeed it did turn out to be uneven, as Jackie swayed out of the way of the attacks Yamcha launched, not moving from the spot, other than a standing jump to evade a leg sweep.

Yamcha decided there was nothing for it but to use his signature technique, the Wolf Fang Gale, only to have the older man bound effortlessly sideways, off the back wall of the arena, and landed behind Yamcha. Even as the desert bandit turned to face him, Jackie struck with an arm chop that flung Yamcha out of the ring by sheer air pressure.

Kurilin was looking nervous, as he'd be the next one to face the white haired warrior. Yamcha, after his initial disbelief at the defeat, accepted it gracefully, and was encouraged by the older man with the comment that he was still young, and would get better.

At last it was Tails' turn to face Namu. The young fox strode out, and turned to face the turbaned warrior, tails waving out behind him like battle banners. They both put their hands together and bowed at the same time, then took up stances. Tails was wishing he'd had time to watch the guy's final qualifying match, but between his extra one, and supporting the others, he hadn't had chance.

"The third match of the quarter-finals is about to begin!" The announcer was playing it for all it was worth. "Our contestants are Namu, mystery man from the dessert lands, and Miles 'Tails' Prower,

the youngest ever competitor in our history, at the tender age of nine. Uneven match? Maybe, but as we've already seen in the previous matches, appearances can be deceptive. Let's give it up for them both!"

The crowd was already cheering, and this redoubled at the announcers words.

The announcer backed out of the ring. "Match three, begin!"

One thing Tails was certain of, this guy was probably far more powerful than anyone he'd previously met in the qualifiers. He looked centred enough to balance a mountain on, with an implacable gaze that could probably out-stare that same mountain. While there was no time limit, the fox broke first. He dashed in at his full but not yet ki-enhanced speed, seeming to blur to outside observers.

As he approached he'd veer past, striking to the side. Hopefully Namu would be confused, striking at the after-image of Tails' approach rather than the actual fox. Instead, his opponent actually closed his eyes!

Tails' perceptions had sped up with his movement, but that didn't help as he got into striking range. Even to him, the guy just disappeared. The fight might have ended at that moment, if Tails hadn't spent hours in free-for-all sparring.

Rather than waste precious milliseconds trying to track the guy, he just changed course off to one side, to an area he knew was safe, just as Namu dropped like a dinosaur killer asteroid out of the sky, smashing a descending kick into the arena flag stones where Tails would have been if he hadn't evaded.

Tails rebounded to take advantage of the attack, spinning in with a twin tail sweep, but Namu managed to bend his upper body backwards, out of the way of the tail strike and continued the movement into a vicious upwards kick, aimed to punt the fox into the next time zone.

However, Tails, even attacking, wasn't in a purely ballistic trajectory, and managed to twist in mid-air, bringing his legs up to land on the upper part of the leg and use it's motion to fling himself into an arc over Namu, landing on the other side and diving straight back in to flurry punches at the hopefully off balance fighter.

But Namu had some how rolled over in that brief time and regained his footing, weathering the flurry with solid forearm blocks. However, Tails had the edge in raw speed, and at least some of his punches leaked through, hitting both the dhoti and lower chest equally.

He wasn't allowed long to press, as Namu drew his own long leg up tight against his chest, and lashed out in a kick that forced the young fox to block it or take a serious hit, and drove him back. Now it was Namu's turn to flurry kicks at Tails, and Tails was on the defensive. His higher speed and reflexes meant he did catch every kick but even diverting them and attempting to soak the impacts was bruising his forearms.

He was being kept at a distance, and slowly being worn down, and that wasn't good. Fortunately, Sonic thinking gave him an alternative. Judging the moment exactly, He pirouetted out of the way bringing his tails up to block and divert the latest kick., spinning inside with a bit of Prower Drill Driver force to deliver a smashing open handed slice to the ribs

It broke the other's attack, but nothing else, as the tall man gasped slightly and faded off to one side to minimise the impact. Tails followed up with a double punch into the guy's middle that sent him flying. However, his direction was towards the one side of the arena that abutted the training hall.

Namu twisted in mid-air to impact against it feet first, and used it to spring forward and pounce on the fox. They'd strayed pretty close, so Tails had little time to react. Rather than trying to evade, he brought up his arms in a double block that wrapped around the other's longer ones, and attempted to fall backwards and throw Namu right over his head.

Namu did go over, but managed to get a grip of his own on the fox's arms, once again managing to get his feet under him rather than just be slammed into the flagged surface. He turned the tables on Tails, bringing him over his head as he jumped up, ascending at least ten feet into the air, and slammed the poor fox down like a spiking a beach-ball.

Tails tried to slow himself with his tails, but at the speed he was descending, ten feet wasn't enough distance. It did, however give him time to brace himself with ki, meaning that although he impacted with enough power to crack the flagstones, he didn't break anything else.

The still form lay face down in the slight depression, tails drooped limply over his body. Namu stood there and bowed. "Forgive me lad. You were a worthy opponent. But my village depends upon my victory."

The announcer came forward. "Is he even breathing?"

"I am a peaceful man. I would not kill, but I judged my attack carefully. He will not awaken for several days. You may start counting, though there is no real need."

"Uh... right.... one... two..."

Tails was feeling... the only possible word was fuzzy. His entire body ached, down to the tips of his tails, and his mind was full of curly pin-wheels. There was someone speaking, two people... He heard the words but couldn't quite get them to line up and be comprehended yet. It had reduced to one person saying something in a measured tone...

"... seven... eight... nine..."

A count, the fight, the contest! His thoughts snapped back into focus, and he pushed off, with hands and feet, springing upwards. He

landed upright in his own crater, blinking slightly, and swaying, but clearly still compus mentis.

Both Namu and the announcer goggled. Namu considered dashing in with a quick attack, but clearly he hadn't been downed, maybe the youngster was faking to draw Namu in. His side still ached from where the fox had caught him.

Tails finally spoke. "Whoa! You really are strong!" The crowd, which had fallen silent at the unexpected end, went mad. Tails solidified his pose, and centred himself, denying the still stunned Indian a chance to finish him.

"But... It can't be! I had the measure of your full strength! How could you..." Namu couldn't finish the sentence..

Tails almost put one gloved hand behind his head, until he realised he'd broken stance and set himself again.

"Uh, I wasn't running at full strength, not until that last attack. That nearly rang my bell, despite my best efforts. I wanted something in reserve for later matches, like my special techniques. Besides, it's forcing me to work on defeating you through skill, not just power, making for better training and a better match."

Namu thought furiously. This child claimed to be even stronger? Well so was he, but the question was who had the most in reserve? Besides, he made a good point about saving power for future matches. A protracted fight at peak power levels might leave even the winner fatigued enough to be at a disadvantage against an opponent who'd won more easily.

He had to finish this quickly, for the sake of his people. Fortunately, the young fox's explanation suggested a way. "You make a good point, lad. Shall we then settle this quickly? Let us oppose our best special techniques, and allow that to decide the winner."

Tails looked thoughtful for a moment, then nodded. "Okay! I'd as soon keep at conventional fighting, you're really good, but that would be more energy efficient."

Namu was a little ashamed at how easily the fox had fallen into his trap. The youngster might be powerful, but he was no match for the Heavenly Cross technique.

"Then prepare yourself lad, I decide the match now! Heavenly Cross technique!" Gathering all his strength, he leapt again, and rose hundreds of feet into the air at lightning speeds. The announcer uncapsulised binoculars, and one of the camera crew did the same for a helicopter camera UAV, which he sent upwards on a hunch.

"Amazing! Contestant Namu has risen so high, he looks like a gnat... but what a gnat!" The announcer yelled into his microphone. "How will Miles counter!"

"I prefer Tails." said the fox, looking up. "That's cool! He jumps even higher than Goku!"

Tails knew that jumping above a certain height wouldn't add anything to Namu's attack, since without tails, or some other form of propulsion, he wouldn't be able to go above terminal velocity for his shape and weight. He focussed his energy into tails and legs, crouched and looked upwards, judging the moment...

He set himself, and called out, "Tail-spin Attack!"

He jumped upwards with a full ki powered leap, and spun up his tails in pusher propeller mode, accelerating upwards to meet the turbaned warrior.

The announcer was looking upwards. "This is unprecedented! The Strongest Under the Heavens tournament has turned into the Strongest In the Heavens tournament! This is unprecedented! Unbelievable! Unimaginable! And most important, uncomfortable on my poor neck!"

A number of people had their pocket TVs tuned to the coverage, as it went to the flying remote. Namu reached the peak of his ascent, and turned to face downwards, bringing his arms forward in a cross shape. He could see Tails ringing to meet him, and adjusted his position in the air to veer to meet him head on.

He would guide his path like a skydiver, dropping to meet the fox, and slam the cross into his upper torso and neck, triggering certain pressure points that would disable his young opponent, no matter how strong he was.

Tails still rising and accelerating, waited until the last moment, then went to a full Tail-spin attack, becoming an orange flying buzz-saw, or rather grinding wheel, as he'd 'softened' the outer surface of his attack just enough to make it bludgeon rather than slice.

He'd waited until the last moment, allowing Namu to gain the highest possible speed and momentum. Now it would come down to who had the more powerful attack. It also meant they impacted fairly low, about a hundred metres above the ground, meaning most of the audience was only looking up at about a sixty degree angle, and could clearly see the impact.

There was an actual gleam of light when they struck, Namu dropping like a stone on the north pole of planet Vegeta, Tails ascending like a saijin training in the Room of Spirit and Time. The crowd held it's breath for a second as the world seemed to slow, then the two rebounded off each other at bullet speeds.

Tails had less distance to go, and was forced downwards by the impact anyway. He plunged out of the sky, no longer spinning, and seemed likely to auger into the arena, until at the last second, his tails snapped out in helicopter mode, and he lowered himself to the floor.

Namu descended less gracefully, after ascending back into the sky. He'd drifted off line, and from his trajectory was looking to measure his length in the circle of grass that bordered the arena.



The announcer was speaking. "And it appears Tails has won the match with a ring out..."

Suddenly Tails sprung up from where he was standing, and flew out of the arena, heading towards the falling fighter.

"Oh, but it looks like he wants to make sure of the job..."

The flying fox veered round as he spoke, banking round and diving to catch Namu. He hauled him up, slowing his descent to a stop a few metres above the ground, and carried him like a cargo helicopter back to the arena where he laid him down gently, then dropped off to one side, standing and watching in a ready stance, tails once again whipping back and forth behind him like battle streamers. The crowd, which had been cheering, fell quiet at this unexpected turn of events.

However, the announcer was close to overloading his microphone. "No, in an unprecedented turn of events, Tails has actually prevented the ring out! What could his reason be?"

Tails glanced over at the blond man with the microphone and sunglasses. "He gave me the full ten count to recover, it's only fair I do the same. Speaking of which?"

Uh... yes... one... two... three... four... five... six... seven... eight... nine... ten! It's a knock out! Tails is the winner of round three!" yelled the announcer.

The crowd went insane. This had been the most intense match so far, and the climax had been spectacular. Tails bowed to his opponent, then punched the air in his trademark manner, with a massive grin. There was a cheer, and no-one was cheering harder than Goku and Kurillin, watching from the steps of the main hall.

Tails heard the other fighter begin to stir turned to face him. He went over to the waking man, offering the just now recovering warrior a hand up. As Namu sat up, his expression was grim, and he shook

his head as if to clear it. However, he took the hand and pulled himself up, breaking into a slight, but genuine smile.

"Congratulations lad, I hope you win it all." He used the handhold to shake Tails' hand.

This display of sportsmanship on both sides had the crowd going nuts, especially with the announcer providing colour commentary.

Tails acknowledged Namu as they walked off. "Thanks! You really gave me an awesome fight."

They reached the screen that shielded the main door of the temple from the arena, and walked around one side. Tails was tackled by a cheering Kurillin, and an equally ecstatic Goku.

"Yeah!" "You did it!" The two formed a ring with Tails, each holding one of the fox's arms to complete it.

"Thanks guys. You were the ones who helped me get strong enough to do it. But I've gotta go ask Namu something."

The announcer was already calling for Giran and Goku for the fourth match. Giran strode over ignoring the trio and entered the ring with a massive "Howdy all!" and completing it with a massive roar.

Goku looked around, "Uh, I gotta go too!" and bounded across the room and out into the arena.

Tails had been reviewing the fight in his head, making mental notes for what to do better next time, because one of the two now out there was going to be his next opponent. He'd finally comprehended what the taller contestant had been saying while Tails was lying in a crater.

"Mr Namu, sir? I hope your village won't be disappointed. You put up a really amazing fight."

Namu was packing up his few belongings in a bindle, and acknowledged the other's comment without thinking. "I will have to

find the money some other way, and you can call me Namu, young fighter." He'd decided that 'lad' wasn't exactly respectful of someone who'd beaten him, even if it was technically correct.

"Just Tails is good." Tails frowned. "Wait, are you saying your village needed the prize money?"

Namu stopped, realising that in his distraction, he'd blown it. "I... The rains have not come to my village. I intended to use the money from the contest to buy water and transport it there to tide us over until the rains do come."

"Oh no..." Tails looked distraught. "I was just... I'll withdraw! Then you can go to the next stage..."

The turbaned man shook his head quite violently. "No! You have earned your place. Besides, if your friends are of the same quality as yourself, I have little hope of winning anyway." he sighed. "I must go, find some other means..."

"No, just wait, if I win, I'll give you the prize money! I don't need it, it wasn't why any of us entered anyway..." There were boos and groans from the arena. Tails looked over. "C'mon, I'll do what I can, but right now I have to be there to support Goku."

The surprised man found his hand grasped, and his being half led, half dragged over to where they could see the ring. Goku wasn't immediately apparent, but Giran was mugging to the crowd, who didn't seem too pleased with him. Then Tails realised that Goku was embedded in a crater that had been one of the bas reliefs on the safety wall separating arena and training hall.

"That rotten...." Kurillin looked like he wanted to stomp out there and turn the monster into luggage. "He faked having something in his hand he wanted to show Goku, and when Mr Innocent looked close, smacked him with a cheap shot!"

The announcer was less partial. "It looks like he's out cold. Could the match have been won in a single..."

Goku unpeeled himself out of the crater and jumped down. Giran goggled, and the rest of the arena gasped.

"This is unbelievable! The wall was shattered, but Son Goku seems unaffected!"

Goku was frowning and rubbing his cheek. "I am not! My cheek got an owiee!"

"Heh, knew a little tap like that wouldn't faze him." Kurilin grinned, and Tails nodded. Yamcha was also watching, and exchanged a hapless glance with Namu, along the lines of 'Ye Gods, what are these kids made of?'

Before Giran could recover, Goku dived in, off handedly blocking a defending hay-maker swing, and planted a massive punch deep in the monster's gut, then jumping right over the creature to grab his tail and fling him out of the arena. "Oyyy... Sho!"

"And it looks like it's all over! Despite his small size, Son Goku has flung Giran out of bounds..."

The announcer seemed to be making a habit of jumping the gun, as Giran then turned over in mid-air, and flew back to the arena on his wings. "Heh. Nice try kid, but you can't get me with a ring out!"

"Then I guess I gotta make you say uncle!" Goku exclaimed, just as Giran opened his mouth again, but only to expel a long streamer of gooey pink stuff that wrapped itself around the young sai-jin. "Gah! What is this stuff!"

"Heh heh! My lasso in' gum!" Giran stomped forward. "Struggle all you like. It just gets stickier. This'll be like punchin' Punch."

Goku was struggling, but to no avail. Giran just strode up and smashed him on the head, then lifted the bound youngster up. "Hey! What're you doing!"

"Throwin' ya way, way out of bounds o'course!"

"C'mon, no, let's fight fair and square!" The crowd was booing and hissing Giran, Kurilin was fuming, and Tails was about ready to jump over the barrier and go 'Destroy all monsters' on the big lizard.

"It looks bleak for Goku! He literally can't raise hand or foot against Giran!" The announcer was wasting no time stating the bloody obvious.

"Out ya go!" Giran hurled Goku out of the ring. Goku had his teeth gritted, his eyes closed, clearly making some final effort to get free, or to stop himself from falling out of bounds. He must have been wishing he could fly like Tails... and despite the lack of Dragon balls, that wish came true as the effort triggered a transformation. A brown furry tail popped out from under the gum.

"Yahoo! My tail grew back!" Goku cried joyfully. He wasted no time putting it to use. Having figured out the Kamehameha blast from seeing it used once, duplicating Tails' basic flight mode, which he'd seen dozens of times, was a cinch.

He stopped in mid-air, supported by a brown disk, and veered back towards the arena, landing in front of the goggling Giran. Tails and Kurilin were cheering, along with the rest of the audience.

"Yeah! Now for some real action!" Goku flexed his muscles and the gum binding him burst apart. He pushed up, balancing on his tail. "Now I'm free and back at full power! Hey guys, give me a target!"

Kurillin picked up a chunk of dressed stone about twice his size in one hand, and flung it up about 10 metres like a volleyball. Tails jumped up above it and slammed it down towards Goku in a vicious

spike. Goku just flicked his tail and threw himself into a flying kick that intercepted the rock and pulverised it. "Hyaaaah!"

"Lots better! Now it's my turn!" He turned to face Giran... who was standing there sweating, quivering and waving a little white flag. "Mercy! Don't hurt me!"

Goku face faulted.

# Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 3

## Chapter 8 - Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 3

The crowd was going wilder than a very wild thing that had extra wild injected into it with an electric wildness inducer. The announcer was approached by the head monk, and after a second spoke, barely audible over the audience.

"Round 4 has ended! Victory to Goku! However, I have been asked to inform the other contestants that interfering in someone else's fight will lead to disqualification. In this case the judges will let it pass, but this is a one time thing."

"Hey, I asked them to throw that rock at me!" Goku exclaimed.

The announcer nodded. "Which is why it's been allowed to pass."

He turned to the crowd, which was still cheering. "It seems all the mysterious 'Turtle' fighters have some serious power! Forget their small size, it just disguises giant warriors! Let's get them up here to talk to the crowd! Kurilin and Tails too!"

The audience was split into those shouting for Goku, those for Kurillin and those for Tails. The others walked into the arena proper, discussing something under their breaths. Kurillin didn't look too happy about whatever it was, but finally sighed, rolled his eyes and nodded, which seemed to make Tails happy.

"You never said you had a tail!" said Kurilin to Goku as they arrived.

"Cause it came off! But now it's back!" Goku turned his back to them and waved it about. Tails nodded, "Oh, yeah, I remember you telling me about it."

The announcer took control of the conversation. "So, all three of you are headed for the semi-finals! Congratulations! Tails, I believe

you're only nine."

This was flicking scar tissue for the young fox. "I'll be ten in a couple of months time! Besides, my age shouldn't be important. Judge me on my skills instead!"

The announcer hadn't expected this. Quick to pour oil on troubled waters, he said, "I just meant that it makes your achievement here even more exceptional."

Tails looked embarrassed. "Oh, yeah, sorry, it's just it's kinda a sore subject for me. I've always had a lot of people treat me like I can't do anything important because I'm too young."

"Looks like you've proved them wrong then." The announcer stated.

"Not yet, but I'm going to." the fox replied with a determined expression.

The announcer was a bit taken aback at the implication that he hadn't done anything important yet, but recovered nicely. "Kurillin, and Goku you're..."

"Thirteen." "Hungry."

Goku's response got a loud laugh from the audience. Kurillin elbowed him. "He wants your age, idiot!"

Goku counted it up on his fingers. "Uh... twelve!"

"Huh? You're younger than me?" Kurilin exclaimed. "I thought you were fourteen!"

"That's before Tails helped me to learn to count right. But I know better now!"

"Oho, so Kurillin is actually the oldest of our three competitors!" The announcer continued. "I would assume since you all wear the same costume, you all come from the same dojo?"



Kurillin answered. "Not exactly. The one who trained us was Muten Roshi, the invincible old master."

The announcer gasped, along with anyone in the audience who knew anything about martial arts. "What? The Turtle Master? You mean the master who is known as the 'god of martial arts'?"

Kurillin grinned. "Yep! He doesn't take on disciples any more, but he made an exception for us."

The audience had a high percentage of martial arts aficionados, so at least half of them had heard of Muten Roshi, even if it was only as a rumour. There was a lot of surprised muttering and wonderment, but very little disbelief at this extraordinary boast. After all, they'd seen the kids in action. Back in the hall, Yamcha noticed 'Jackie Chun' preening slightly as the announcer went on.

"Amazing? Trained by Kame Sen'nin, the invincible master! Who'd have imagined it? Who'd have dreamed it was possible? Who'd have thought he was still alive?"

There was the sound of a distant face-fault from the training hall, audible over the exclamations of the crowd. After helping the old man up, Yamcha asked him if he was actually Muten Roshi, but the old man deflected his questions as easily as he'd earlier evaded his strikes. Meanwhile, outside...

"So what is he like?"

"Old, and he wears a turtle shell." Goku said. Tails added. "Actually, he looks a lot like Jackie Chun, except Master Roshi is bald and wears sunglasses all the time."

"Ah, he shaves his head to let the ki flow more freely?"

Kurillin grinned. He'd been caught by that, and now he was on the other end. "Nope, he's just bald. When you're as powerful as Master Roshi you don't \_need\_ any extra power boost."

"I once saw the old timer blow away a whole mountain with a Kamehameha blast." stated Goku. "He really is an awesome martial artist!"

"So about your tail Goku? Is that special tail flying technique part of your training?"

Goku shook his head. "Naw, Tails could already do it when I met him, and now I've got my own tail again, I sorta copied it. You don't mind, do ya Tails?"

Tails shook his head. "I'm just happy it let you fix that Giran guy good and proper! That goon and his cheap shots! I just wish you'd had a chance to really cut loose."

The announcer turned back to Tails. "Since the two of you will be paired in the semi-final, I'm sure you will. So how did you learn to use your tails to fly?"

Tails shrugged. "I came up with it myself. I needed to go faster to keep up with my friend Sonic, and kept trying until I could. Some of my other techniques are based on his, like the Tail-spin attack, my version of his Sonic Buzzsaw, but I've still got a couple I haven't used yet."

"Remarkable! Well, all three of you have a chance to go all the way to the top, and win the title of Strongest Under the Heavens, and the 50 million zeni prize purse. If you win, what are you going to do with it?"

"Give it to Namu. He entered the contest so he could get the money to buy water for his village. They're in the middle of a drought."

The announcer looked shocked. "You're just going to \_give\_ it away?"

Tails nodded. "It's not like I need it. I just entered the contest because Master Roshi said it'd be a chance to train against some

really tough opponents. And I need to get stronger. Besides, it's a martial artist's duty to help people. That's something Master Roshi said too."

The announcer moved to Kurilin. "And you?"

The young monk sighed. "I'm in with Tails. Not that I figure it'll take the whole 50 million."

"And you, Goku?" The announcer asked.

"Zeni is that stuff you buy things with, right? I'd have bought food, but Tails' idea is better, so I guess I'm in too."

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I am speechless." The announcer lied as he shook his head. "It appears that with these three students of the Turtle school, the only thing greater than their fighting prowess is the size of their hearts. Let's hear it for Goku, Kurilin and Tails!"

The crowd did it's best, but was unable to get any louder without a rock concert speaker system, or tactical nuclear weapons. As they calmed back down to a dull roar announcer called the fifth match, and asked Jackie Chun to come out. Tails and Goku exchanged last minute good luck speeches with Kurilin, and retired behind the chest high retaining wall.

The white haired martial artist was clearly a bit miffed that he hadn't been interviewed, and took the microphone away from the announcer before playing up to the crowd in a song and dance routine, especially the ladies. Goku almost joined in, but Tails persuaded him not to, on the grounds that they'd had their time on stage. Besides, it looked truly daft. The dead silence at the end of it showed that the audience thought so too.

However, Jackie Chun was all business when he faced off against Kurilin. The young monk made the first assault, dashing forward with a straight punch, which Jackie evaded with a back flip, followed by a

flurry of side kicks and a sweeping crescent kick which had the older martial artist dodging and diving.

Kurilin maintained the pressure by maintaining the spin of his kick, parleying it into a spinning back elbow that drove Jackie to bend backwards to escape, which set him up for another rock crushing straight punch. There was a thwap of flesh hitting flesh, which ended with Jackie standing there, having swept back and caught the punch with one hand. The two jumped backwards away from each other to analyse their initial exchange.

Jackie was the next to move, with a "Let's try..." He blurred, and was suddenly inside Kurilin's defence, punching him with a force that sent him flying. Fortunately, the trajectory was intercepted by the retaining wall in front of the temple, the boundary of that side of the field. Kurilin wiped the trickle of blood from his nose as he sat there. "That punch... I didn't even see it coming!"

"I did!" stated Tails. "But you've spotted faster ones... you just weren't expecting it."

"Me too," added Goku, "You just have to look real close."

Kurilin jumped up and moved back in to face off against Jackie.

"Ho! Won't give up? This time I won't take it easy on you." The older man blurred again, but this time there was a crackle rather than a single smack before the two jumped away.

"That the way!" "Told you so!" Tails and Goku were leading the cheering.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, clearly something happened, but we're not sure quite what." The announcer exclaimed.

"He blocked my punch, then countered with a snap kick while he had me engaged, which I stopped with a downwards X-block, which I reversed to an upward X-block to catch the punch to the head he

threw, and tried to use one hand as an open palm strike to his collarbone, which he caught." Jackie Chun threw as an aside, then said to Kurilin. "It's been a long time since anyone has kept up with my speed."

"Well I'm the one to do it!" replied Kurilin, "I was personally trained by the invincible old master, and practised against Goku and Tails. I had to be fast!"

They engaged again, this time blurring, and ending up at opposite ends of the ring. Kurilin swayed, and fell forwards with a thump.

"C'mon Kurilin! Get up! You can do it!" called Goku, and Tails was no less vocal.

On the count of eight, he finally staggered to his feet. Once again, Jackie Chun was forced to explain, with assists from Kurilin and a demonstration, what had happened, which involved sweep kicks, punches, a round of stone-paper-scissors and a bluff which ended with Kurilin taking a flying kick to the head.

Kurilin calculated his chances, and found them not good. Jackie Chun was his superior in strength and ability. Fortunately, he'd studied the old man's form and actions and discovered a weakness, which he had a way to exploit. He let his eyes focus past the old man's head and exclaimed, "Ran Fan should have put on more clothes before wandering about like that!"

He'd originally planned to find a pair of panties to throw down, but decide they might come under the 'using weapons' rule, and besides, he didn't want to look like as big a pervert as the other. "Huh?" Jackie Chun whipped his head around to scan the crowd, and Kurilin took his shot.

"You fell for it!" Kurilin bounded in and planted the most powerful kick he could muster to Jackie's head. The old guy was sent flying right out of the ring. 'What is it with old martial artists and hentai?' he

wondered, but not for long. The old guy was right out of the stadium... that meant, "I've won!"

Then the distant speck put it's hands together and yelled out something.

It fired off a blast of energy like a rocket engine... exactly like a rocket engine as it propelled him right back in an arc to land on the arena. Kurilin stood there, eyes bugging out and slack jawed. He wasn't the only one, the entire crowd and the announcer were joining in. Goku identified it as the Kamehameha, and Jackie Chun confirmed it

"Can you believe it! For the first time ever, we have witnessed the Kamehameha with our own eyes! They say that the only person capable of it is the legendary Muten Roshi, but today we have found another!"

Behind the wall, Yamcha smirked, 'That's because he is Muten Roshi! Just like I thought!'

Kurilin was out of ideas. "Arrghh! What'm I going to do!"

"Whaddya think! Win!" called out Goku. Kurilin groaned, "What kinda advice is that!"

Tails was more helpful. "Try something he doesn't expect!" Okay, not much more helpful. "Use his own moves against him!"

Kurilin shook his head and gritted his teeth. "Okay! No choice but for an all out attack!"

As the monk dashed forward, Jackie Chun sighed. "Become desperate and you play into your opponent's hands!"

As Kurilin came within a few paces, the old martial artist jumped to evade him, only to see Kurilin's face take on an intense focus as he glanced up and jumped. There was a pillar either side of the

entrance to the arena, and Kurilin, head now down, slammed into the old martial artist and sent them both flying into it, catching Jackie between a rock (the pillar) and a hard place (his head).

The pillar shattered, and neither of the contestants were looking that well. But Kurilin, facing the wall, Jackie, and his friends, grinned somewhat mazily. "Heh, whatdya know, Tails, it worked!"

Jackie suddenly stood from where he'd been favouring his stomach, and said, "Well played, youngster, but it's time to end this..."

He seemed to waver slightly in Kurilin's field of view, even more so than the rest of the arena.

"No! He's be..." Even Goku couldn't get out his warning fast enough, but Kurilin had trained with Goku and Tails. While wasn't yet fast enough to pull off a shadow attack, where an opponent moved so fast he left a false after-image, the other two were, so he knew what it looked like. He was already dropping to the floor, and Jackie Chun's double open palms strike to his neck hit only empty air.

Even as he landed, he brought in his legs and set his hands, lashing out in a double mule kick that caught Jackie right where the monk's head had already landed. The old master staggered back a few feet, but Kurilin had put too much into his attack, and was comparatively slow withdrawing. The older martial artist grabbed his feet, and swung him round like throwing a hammer.

Even then Kurilin tried to recover by breaking himself free when he'd end up heading towards the retaining wall, but ended up hitting the section already weakened by his earlier hit. He went straight through, into the wall of the training hall itself, and out of bounds.

Jackie Chun stood there, and made a V sign, as the crowd cheered his name. "Groovy."

"And Jackie Chun wins by a ring out! What an amazing climax! For a moment, it looked like the rookie Kurillin had turned the tables on

him, but with this victory, it is Jackie Chun who will go on to face Tails or Goku in the championship match!"

Kurillin was surrounded by Goku and Tails as he woke up. "Uhhh! I lost? Aww Nuts!"

"But you were fantastic out there!" Tails exclaimed. "You were making him work for it, and if the wall hadn't given way, you'd still be fighting!"

"Are you okay?" Goku asked.

"I'll tell you when my bones click back into place!" groaned Kurilin. "Sorry, Tails, I guess helping Namu is up to you or Goku. But I gotta warn you, that guy is really strong! And fast, and tough too! I don't think I could have won even if I hadn't been thrown out!"

"No-one can say you weren't doing your very best." said Tails sympathetically. At this moment, he wasn't Kurilin's student, but his friend. "That's all anyone can ask."

"Don't worry! The stronger the better!" grinned Goku.

The pair helped him up, and half carried him into the training hall, waving away the stretcher party. They were clearly visible from the arena for a moment, and the crowd started cheering 'Kurilin' too. Inside, he was sat on a bench, as Jackie Chun entered. As soon as he was out of sight of the crowd, he rubbed his stomach, then saw the trio looking at him, and stopped.

"You need more training lad." he stated. "But for what it's worth, you've clearly worked hard. I haven't had any one push me like that for years."

"I had some great sparring partners..." Kurilin looked from side to side at his friends, "... and I was trained by the invincible master himself!"



Yamcha stood off to one side, shaking his head. "Don't you guys get it? He is Muten Roshi!"

All three of them looked confused. Goku said, "You're crazy! The old timer's bald!"

"You've never heard of wigs? Goku, you have a sharp nose, you can smell if it's him!"

Goku came up to Jackie Chun. "Y'know it does, a bit, but it's kinda hard to tell. There's another stronger smell..."

Jackie pulled out a spray bottle and spritzed himself. "Cologne. I'm quite the dandy you know."

"Besides, why would Master Roshi enter and try to beat us?" Tails asked. "He was the one to suggest this in the first place! Unless he figured that winning would make us cocky, and slack off. But that's just nuts! Goku loves to fight more than anything, I've got my mission to prepare for, and I won't settle for being anything less than my best, and Kurilin has worked as hard as either of us."

The young fox shook his head.

"Uh uh! Master Roshi is far too wise to think that this is anything more than a training exercise for us, at least it was until we decided we needed to win for Namu's village's sake. He has more faith in us than that. Right guys?"

"Yeah!" Goku replied immediately. Kurillin was a bit more tentative, almost embarrassed. "Actually, I'd have quite liked the title and the money for myself, but the one thing winning wouldn't have stopped me doing is training to get better!"

"Match number seven! Contestants Tails and Goku to the arena please!"

"This's gonna be great!" Goku bounced up and headed for the door. Tails nodded in agreement, and said, "Kurilin-sensei, when you feel better, come watch us. I know Master Roshi will be, and I want to show you both your efforts weren't wasted."

Kurilin did get up and followed them to the ringside, though rubbing aching parts of his body. As Tails passed Jackie Chun, who was looking decidedly dyspeptic, all the more so after his speech, he added. "Uh, maybe Kurilin hit you harder than you realised. You should go to the infirmary."

Oddly enough, that only made the old martial artist look even less comfortable. Yamcha just smirked as they passed beyond earshot. "Better start thinking up apologies!"

# Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 4

## Chapter 9 - Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 4

The announcer had decided to go all out, reaching new levels of hyperbole as he introduced the fight.

"And now our penultimate match! The winner will go through to the championship for what is shaping up to be an epic final against Master Jackie Chun! But now, we have two friends, brothers in arms, disciples of the same school in a no-holds barred clash of the tiny titans!

"We have Goku, the second youngest contestant ever, the little guy with the big punch! He comes through to this round after having handled the monster Giran like small change, and scared him so badly he cried forfeit! Facing him is Tails, the only younger contestant, a fighting, flying fox who's shown he can put his opponents in a spin! His defeat of the redoubtable Namu was little short of astounding."

The crowds were whooping, cheering and chanting both their names roughly equally. Goku was unselfconsciously grinning and waving, while Tails was looking at the floor, tails drooping and grinding one foot against the flagstones, clearly embarrassed.

"We can only hope that they will continue to amaze us with a truly spectacular performance!" The announcer jumped back off the platform and called, "Match 7, Begin!"

The two friends bowed to each other, and took stances, looking into each others eyes. They held for a moment, then as if some unseen signal passed between them, the two shot forward. They blurred, and reappeared in the centre of the arena, trading punches and strikes which were little more than after-images.

Tails faded to one side, and spin kicked at Goku's head, only to have his foot snagged by Goku's tail, which he simply used as a pivot to slam his body around, driving his own tails home. They barely caught Goku on the back of the head as he ducked, and in retaliation his tail flipped Tails across the ring and into the ground, though the vulpine spun to bring his feet under him and landed in a crouch, sliding away from the sai-jin.

Goku rubbed the back of his head. "Nice one!"

"Lucky shot. Didn't have time to put any power behind it." Tails shrugged. He zoomed in then sprung over the other, kicking downwards as he passed over head. Goku dropped into a crouch to avoid the heel of the fox's running shoe, then sprung up to snatch at his tails, grabbing one in each hand.

Tails simply tucked and rolled forward, spinning to drive himself into the start of a Tail-spin attack which hauled Goku around and over, slamming him into the floor and cracking the flags under him.

Goku did let go of the tails, but only to leave his hands free so that as he flipped to his feet, seeming none the worst for his experience, he could launch a one-two punch at the landing fox. Tails veered and dropped back, trying to evade, but Goku was too close and managed to catch him in the torso, getting a couple of hits before the fox used his superior manoeuvrability to get out Goku's zone.

"Whoof!" Tails gasped. "Didn't expect such a fast recovery..." He recovered himself, and moved around, opposite the retaining wall. "Time to get serious! Tail-spin Attack!"

He turned into the glowing golden orange disk of a full power Tail-spin attack which shot at Goku. The sai-jin warrior jumped to the side at the last minute, but Tails rebounded off the retaining wall and ploughed into him from the back, flinging him up into the air. Goku managed to spin round and face downwards just as Tails came out of his spin dash and sprang upwards in a power-leap that was augmented by the full power of his spiralling tails.

Goku blocked the initial impact, an ascending spin kick that nevertheless sent him even higher, but without solid footing, his un-powered trajectory put him at a disadvantage against Tails' controlled movements, and he took several lightning fast but solid punches and kicks that slipped past his guard and affected even him.

Suddenly Goku thought of something. "Haaah! Two can play at that game!"

His own monkey tail span up, driving him forward into Tails' attacks and stopping his ascent. Now things were more even. Tails still had the manoeuvrability and power advantage, his twin tails and greater flying experience balancing Goku's greater strength, but Goku was no longer a free floating punching bag.

Goku finally managed to get in a solid straight kick of his own through Tails' defence, driving him downwards, and then exclaimed. "My turn for a special technique!" He pulled his hands together and slammed them forward. "Kamehameha!

Tails braced himself, and veered to evade, but the blast shot past to the side of his original position. "Kamehameha! Kamehameha!" Two more blasts flew past him on other sides, hardly needing to be dodged. Goku was might have the technique down, but his aim sucked. There were explosions as they hit the arena floor as they impacted.

Tails stopped bracing, and started racing upwards instead. Goku was leaving himself open, and the wind-up time, even if he managed to fire one right at Tails, the vertically vectoring vulpine would have time to go into evasive manoeuvres. There it was, Goku was pulling together a bigger one...

Suddenly, there were sheets of rubble on every side. Tails realised he'd been suckered. Now he was trapped by the debris thrown up from those 'mis-aimed' Kamehamehas. At the speed he'd have to move into them, he'd get seriously hammered, and possibly loose

control of his flight, easy prey for a follow-up. But getting hit by the attack Goku was about to throw would be worse.

Tails tried to move into melee range, to disrupt the attack, but Goku was flying straight up and back, making the most of his greater power, and helped by the reaction thrust of the previous energy blasts.

Suddenly Tails had an idea. He threw himself into another forward spin, lighting up with a golden battle aura. As Goku yelled, "Kamehameha!" Tails responded with "Tail-spin Defence!"

The announcer was commenting as all this happened "Ladies and gentlemen, this is incredible! It appears that we have a third student of the legendary Kamehameha, and he's throwing them like snowballs! Ohhh! And it looks like Tails has been trapped by Goku's decoy attacks... Wait..."

The blast of energy was two-thirds the size of Tails, and hit the spinning disc that was the fox edge on in direct central impact. For a few seconds it pushed him downwards... then split, two smaller spheres of energy that slid past on either side, smashing into the already crumbled flagstones below.

"... even more amazing, Tails has apparently managed to develop a \_defence\_ against the once unbeatable technique! Every time I believe we have seen the greatest heights these young fighters can achieve, they prove me wrong. And this is just the semi-finals!"

Tails dropped to the ground, lightly enough that the rubble he'd landed on barely settled. He was in a ready stance, but smouldering slightly.

Goku landed opposite him, having been unable, or unwilling to follow up his attack.

"Huh? How did you do that?"

"Elementary physics. A beam of energy can always be diverted. I came up with a variant of my regular attack. I figured if I focussed the rim of my Tail-spin defence into a tight enough edge, I could locally out-power your attack."

He beat at some of the more smoking patches of his his outfit. "It worked, but it left my sides weak, and some of the energy leaked through. I'll have to work on that."

Goku shook his head. "Whatever you did it worked! I've just thought up a new move too. Ready? One... two..."

Goku pulled himself up, and started spinning like a top. It precessed towards Tail, ploughing up a rooster tail of debris from the damaged arena floor. Tails bounded backwards, then did a handspring and flip to the side when the gyroscopic Goku followed him. He moved in and struck, only to be flicked away.

"Hmmm..." Landing, the fox immediately wound up a Tail-spin attack of his own, driving forward to meet the rotating blur. There was a sound of heavy impact, and suddenly Tails was tumbling away, landing on his back and sliding to a stop just short of the ring edge.

As Tails sat up, wiping a trickle of blood from his mouth with the back of one glove, the announcer came up to him. "What happened?"

"He can oppose attacks from any direction, but when I tried to Tail-spin, He leaned back, and precession swung him to one side. I flew right past him, and our rotations must have synchronised. He caught me a full power...", he pushed off and sprang up and over Goku, who'd ploughed forward on the attack again. "... kick, right in the jaw."

A number of the audience members winced, remembering how once of Goku's kicks had previously reduced a boulder to sand. Others were wondering just what the kits jaw was made of, adamantium?

The announcer had wisely backed off, saying to the crowd. "Is this the end? It seems Goku has deployed an unbeatable defence!"

Tails wiped his mouth again. "Wouldn't say that. It's good..." Back flip away, spring to the side, "... but I've found at least three weak points."

He spun up again into a Tail-spin attack, but rotated in mid-air to scythe horizontally towards Goku. This time, when they struck, it was Goku who was blasted backwards, though tails rebounded too. He landed some distance away.

"One, if you can synchronise rotations, or go faster, you can bypass the defence."

Tails jumped up in a mighty leap, diving down in mid-air upon Goku who was closing on him again. He dropped on him from above with a double kick and jumped off to land on the other side.

"Two, it leaves your axis of rotation undefended."

The rotating blur was now looking distinctly wobbly, like a top that had just about run out of spin. As Tails stood there, arms folded, it resolved into a pirouetting Goku, who collapsed on the floor, eyes swirly. "Ehhhh.... Make the world stop spinning!"

"Three, over-use it and it'll make you really dizzy. There's a trick to it..."

Goku was still flat on his back. "Uhh... I don't feel so good."

Tails reached down and offered him a hand. "Turn your head against the spin and keep your eyes on a single point for as long as possible, then whip your head round with your eyes closed."

"Uh... shouldn't you be attacking?" The announcer said. "The match is still on."



"You aren't counting, and Goku isn't ready." Tails replied as he helped his friend up. He stepped back a dozen paces. "Goku, you back with us?"

The spiky haired kid shook his head as if attempting to dislodge something, possibly his sense of balance. "Pretty much. Okay..." He took a stance.

Tails responded. "Good! I figured my own version of that technique. Watch! Power Drill Driver!" His tails wrapped around his body like barber-pole stripes, and he spun up the same way Goku did, but the fox drilled straight down into the ground.

Goku moved around, looking for Tails's emergence point, but was caught as the spiralling fox burst out of the ground as an oblique angle, veering in mid-air to strike him. Goku barely got a block up, and was flung backwards, up into the air.

Tails almost immediately broke out of his drilling form and shot forward under tail propeller power, holding one arm to cover himself while his other, and both legs flurried strikes at the off balance sai-jin. Goku managed to right himself and attack back, while retreating and pulling himself into an almost vertical ascent with his lone tail.

The announcer was well... what do you think? "Ohh! It looks like Tails now has the lower position, but the upper hand! Goku seems to be at his mercy!"

Tails simply swung back into drill mode, ascending vertically to once again smash at Goku's defences. Goku was caught by the change, and took a hit but ended up caught on the tip of the technique rather than being driven back. Actually it looked as if he switched direction on his tail-copter and dove onto it.

Goku's tail was counter-rotating, and he quickly ended up spinning with the drill attack. He snagged one of the fox's ankles and reversed his tail, opposing the spin. As Tails lost momentum, Goku hurled him downwards and outwards like a bullet, flying up further purely from

the reaction force. Even though he was travelling at a speed that made him a barely visible streak, it was clear that Tails was trying to control his trajectory.

He arced down, veering so that rather than ploughing into the greensward surrounding the arena, he'd land on the flagstones at the edge of the arena. The very edge, as he had only fractions of a second to work in, but he succeeded. There was an instant of him landing feet first, then a crunch, and a cloud of rock dust.

As it cleared, it revealed his landing point was now a jagged notch in the edge of the arena flooring. The path of the notch lead down to the grass, and an angled hole driven into it. The crowd fell silent, except for a few gasps of shock, and the announcer came round to see it clearly. He glanced up into the sky, scanning the air for the fox, but there was only Goku, dropping to land lightly by the notch.

"Tails! Are you okay?"

There was a groan from the hole, and a muddied white glove appeared over the edge. Tails pulled himself out of the hole, assisted by Goku who'd stepped down the notch to help, even before the announcer called out, "And the victory goes to Goku, via a ring out! A shocking conclusion to an impressive performance!"

The crowd applauded and cheered, most of them for Goku, but not a few of them for Tails. The fox was simply moving to the centre of the field, and shaking himself to remove the dirt.

"It appears that Tails hit the edge of the arena so hard, it crumbled, and he smashed through it and into the ground! What a disappointment this must be for our youngest contestant ever!"

Tails hung his head. Goku put an arm around him. "Hey, don't worry, you put up a great fight! I haven't had that much fun in ages!"

There were a few 'Awws' from the crowd.

Tails sighed. "It's not that, not much anyway. We fought, you were better than me, you shows I need to train even harder."

"Only because the ring broke!" Goku shook his head.

The young fox grinned ruefully. "Wouldn't have happened if you hadn't found a weakness in my last technique and exploited it. I never expected someone could match my rotation speed. Still, better I learn about my weak points with a friend, than up against Robotnik's Swat-bots. it's just... I'm sorry."

"Huh?" Goku looked nonplussed. "What for?"

"This business with Namu. I got you into it, and now you're carrying the can." Tails shook his head. "So, I'm sorry..."

"I'm going through to the finals, I just had a great fight, I'm going to have another that's even better!" Goku was beaming. "If Jackie Chun is as powerful as Kurilin says. You just figure out what you need to do to fix Namu's village, I'll make sure they get the prize money!"

Tails looked relieved. "Thanks Goku! If anyone can beat Jackie Chun, it's you!"

They didn't realise that the announcer had moved in to talk to them, and caught most of the conversation with the microphone. As they turned to walk off, they ended up facing him.

"So Tails, you're not disappointed? After fighting your way through to the semi-finals, only to fall at the last hurdle, and to a freak accident?"

Tails drew his hand through his fringe, and looked quizzical. "Well... yeah, but it's not like I'm going to cry about it or anything. I did my best, and it wasn't quite enough, but it's only a competition. Goku's going to help me keep my promise. Now \_that's\_ important."

"You're \_that\_ sure Goku's going to win?"

Tails grinned. "Oh yeah! Jackie Chun may be tough, but Goku's tougher."

The announcer turned to Goku. "And what do you have to say about this?"

Goku looked uncharacteristically serious. "I've got to win. Tails is counting on me. So I'm gonna." There was a rumbling noise. "Though I'm really hungry now. I've gotta eat first."

The crowd burst into laughter, but Tails just said, "I think I saw some concession stands on the way in..."

The announcer turned to the audience as the two went off-stage, to the cheers and applause of the crowd.

"So there you have it folks! The final will be age and experience versus youth and enthusiasm. Jackie Chun versus Son Goku in a no-holds barred, knock down, drag out fight to the finish, with the 50 million zeni purse and the title of Strongest Under the Heavens riding on the outcome.

"After a brief 30 minute intermission our contestants will be taking the mat. This will allow our contestants to recuperate... and eat..." This got another laugh.

The announcer looked around the arena, most of which looked like it had been hit by a meteor shower. The areas that weren't craters had been turned into paving so crazy, they needed a straight jacket and tranquillizers.

"It'll also give us a chance to make some repairs to the ring. So now's the time to stock up on snacks, and go buy those souvenir t-shirts and sport bottles. All that's left is to determine who is Strongest Under the Heavens! And it's clear it's going to be a fight everyone here will remember for the rest of their lives!"

He didn't know just how right he was, or what part Tails would play in making sure that it would actually require more than short term memory to do so for most of the crowd.

**Authors notes:** Yes, Tails lost. He was fighting \_Goku\_ for Kami-sama's sake, and I just couldn't see him winning. He's come a long way, but he's still got a way to go and things to learn. That's why it's called 'Training Tails', and not, 'Tails Wins Automatically, because he's awesome!' Not that I don't think he's awesome, because I do. Besides, the people out there who are even more rabid Tails fans than I am, all three of you, can tell yourself he only lost because the ring failed.

So don't give up yet. Just because he's not still in the competition, doesn't mean he hasn't got a vital part to play in this arc. If you want to see Tails being a Big Darned Hero, the next chapter is for you. The last chapter of the Tenka-ichi Budo-kai arc, the astoundingly originally titled, 'Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 5'.

# Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 5

## Chapter 10 - Tails of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai Part 5

Fortunately, Goku didn't have to hit the concession stands. Papaya Island Take-out Beef-bowl and Ramen Emporium did a 15 minute door-to-door delivery service. Goku did an even more impressive, '5 minute consume 8 deluxe beef-bowls and 8 super-size bowls of special ramen service.' Fortunately, 20000 zeni from the unused 'Tails Clothing fund' paid for the food and a decent tip.

Tails had other things on his mind. First he sat with Namu, finding out just how many people and how much acreage they had to provide water for, and where his village actually was. Fortunately, there were geography books among the files loaded into Bulma's old pocket computer.

It was also fortunate that Tails had been part of the dull but vital task of keeping Knothole fed. One of the problems of having a secret base in a gorge in the forest, was that growing area was very limited, which meant irrigation, supplemented by gathering from the forest, fishing, and a creaky carni-culture synthesiser, kept powered originally by Swat-bot power cells and now the new water wheel.

A population as small as that of Knothole also couldn't support drones. Everybody worked, which probably explained why Antoine, despite his omni-phobia, was on the combat roster. As if the great son of noble military parents would stoop to 'the labour manuel'. Even occasionally having to risk his precious tail on missions was better than that. Tails, of course, would have jumped at the chance to switch places.

The up-shot was that when Rotor had planned upgrading the irrigation system, Tails had done a lot of the mental grunt work, research using Nicole, measuring the water flow of the river that ran through Knothole and tabulating the size of the fields to be irrigated.

As a result, he now could make some fairly intelligent estimates of how much water Namu's village needed.

Some factors differed, evaporation rates, irrigation methods, crop types and such, but Bulma's grade school text-book files had a lot of dull statistics. Of course, teasing the necessary answers out of them by pulling the scattered data together would require a genius... so that wasn't a problem. By the time the take-out had arrived, Tails had arrived at some answers, and Namu had finally accepted that Tails hadn't just been spinning tails... sorry tales, about helping.

"I had no idea how much would be needed!" The turbaned martial artist exclaimed. "Can even the prize buy that much water?"

Tails shook his head. "Getting the water isn't a problem." he pulled up a world map on the pocket computer and zoomed in on Namu's region. "You're less than 500 kilometres away from that mountain range to the east. There's at least a dozen lakes we can use. Or the ocean coast to the west, give me free run of a junk yard and I'll build you a desalination machine. The one thing you guys have plenty of is solar power."

While the lion's share of the food had gone to Goku, Tails and Kurillin had ordered themselves some too. Kurilin brought Tails' order over, a deluxe ramen.

"Thanks Kurillin! As I said, getting the water isn't the problem, storing and transporting it is. I'm almost certain there must be flying tankers or capsule storage units available... I'll have to ask Bulma, she may not know herself, but she'll know who can tell me. Even hiring them is going to be expensive, I guess, but Goku will handle that."

"You're really into that." Kurilin commented.

Tails was taking a sip from his ramen bowl, and slurped up some noodles before answering. "Yup. I'm learning to fight because I have to, to help my friends, and defeat Robotnik. But what I want to do is invent things, things that can help people. This is an

engineering problem, maybe not my usual line, but something I know how to solve."

"Each to his own, I guess." The young monk shrugged.

Tails, while not trained in the Lina Inverse/Ranma Saotome school of Martial Arts High Speed eating, he had become fairly fast on the chopsticks when he needed to be, and quickly consumed the rest of his late lunch, though he wished he had a chilli-dog too.

"Speaking of Bulma, I should have just enough time to go ask her before the final. I'll see you all soon!"

He put his bowl by the stack that Goku was leaving, dashed out of one of the side entrances, and took to the air, overflying the crowd until he spotted, Bulma, Puar, and Oolong. Master Roshi was nowhere to be seen. He auto-rotated down, waving. "Miss Bulma! I need to ask you something!"

"Tails? You're really okay?" Bulma exclaimed, as he landed on the parapet in front of her. There was a lot of surprised muttering and exclamations from the other spectators.

"Sure, why wouldn't I be?" The young fox dropped down, landing in a sitting position on the retaining wall of the bleachers, facing the teenage inventor.

"Because being slammed through a solid stone floor generally hurts?" The wrench wench of Capsule Corps responded.

"Oh, that." Tails said dismissively, and pulled out his pocket computer. "I've toughened up a lot while I was training with Master Roshi. Sparring with Goku and Kurilin helped too. Besides, it wasn't solid stone. The paving was only a couple of inches thick, underneath it was loose fill and a concrete retaining wall. If it had been solid, I probably wouldn't have ringed out."



He handed the computer to her. "It really needs dura-steel reinforcing, and possibly some force field generators to protect the crowd. If one of those Kamehameha's had gone the wrong way... But that's not what I want to talk to you about. I've worked out the water requirements for Namu's village, and I was hoping you could tell me what sort of storage units Capsule Corp make, either flying water tankers, or just capsulised tanks with pumping systems. You can see from the map where we can get water, the problem is carrying it. I need to figure out the costs too."

Bulma was fascinated by Tails' off-hand comment about force fields, but applied herself to the task at hand. She flicked through the calculations and notes on the screen. "You worked all this out yourself?"

"I had almost a quarter hour before the take-out arrived, and your computer had all the info I needed. Does it look okay to you?"

Bulma reckoned she could have done it faster, but not much. Well reasoned out too. Besides, she could detect a distinct note of a plea for approval. It wasn't something she'd had directed at her often, and it brought back to her that Tails, grown up as he might act most of the time, was still very much a kid in some ways. And this was clearly important to him in a way the Strongest Under the Heavens title wasn't.

"Uh huh, this is good work." The way Tails beamed in response made her feel like she'd done a good deed. "I've got a Capsule Corps catalogue on my computer, I'll find what you're after." She pulled her own computer, a bigger, shinier and slimmer model, out of her handbag, and got to work.

As she worked away, one of the braver, or more inquisitive spectators, a young tiger-striped cat, not much older than Tails himself, managed to make her way up to him.

"M... Mister Tails, sir? Could I have your autograph?" She held out a souvenir brochure, and a pen.

Tails looked around at her. "What? Oh sorry, I don't think I have one."

Oolong smirked. "She wants you to sign your name on that brochure!"

"Well, okay..." Somewhat bemused, Tails took the brochure, and wrote "Miles 'Tails' Prower" on it. He still preferred just 'Tails', but he guessed this was another case where his full name would be appreciated. He thought of something. "And no need to call me 'Mister', even if I am trying to water some plants."

The cat-girl giggled, and added, "Could you make it out to Mei?"

He added it and clutched it to her chest as he handed it back, and practically bounced up and down with glee. "This is so great! All the guys at the dojo back home will flip out!"

Bulma was still working away at her research, so he asked. "You do martial arts too?"

"A bit, well for a couple of years now. One day I want to come here as a competitor!" She looked a bit downcast. "But the other students say I'll never do it, that it's impossible."

"Kurillin had similar trouble back at the temple where he trained before he came to Master Roshi. In fact the two main culprits were here in the preliminaries. His first match, he took the one guy out in a single kick, and he pulled that to avoid hurting the guy too badly. Seems they were the ones who weren't up to the challenge."

He knew the feelings she must have, he'd felt the same way often enough. This was time for Bunnie-style thinking again.

"If it's important to you, then go for it, full speed and don't look back. You may not succeed, heck, I've proved that, but if you don't try, you're guaranteed to fail. Like when I invent something, I don't throw it away if it doesn't work first time, or someone else says it

won't. I keep trying, re-building, testing until it does work. Gosh, I'm rambling..."

"No, I understand." She gave him a brilliant smile. "I'll do it! Thank you!"

Some of the other spectators had noticed Mei getting his autograph. "Hey! I want one too!" "Me too!" Some of them started to push their way round to where he was. Tails saw people getting shoved, and sprang up into the air, hovering in tail-copter mode.

"Hey! Stop that! If you're all pushing, someone's going to get hurt! Look, I'll come to you. Everyone wanting an autograph, hold you paper or whatever up, and I'll sign it! But if you try to jump the queue, I'll miss you out."

He dropped down. "Uh, Mei, could I borrow your pen?" The next few minutes had him doing a hummingbird impression, vectoring from upraised brochure to autograph pad, armed with that which is mightier than the sword. It was easier and faster to stay hovering as he wrote. Before the Turtle school training, he'd have been exhausted after a couple of minutes of it, but now it was little more effort than walking.

He returned to Bulma as the monks who'd been fixing the arena started packing up. He was about to hand the pen back to Mei, when he had a thought. "Look, shall I see if I can get the others to sign your brochure too? It's the least I can do after borrowing your pen. Mei nodded eagerly, and gave him the brochure again.

Bulma smirked as handed him his pocket computer. "Looks like you're a big hit!"

Tails shrugged. "I didn't expect anyone would be that interested in the guy who \_lost\_."

"Okay, I've loaded some options across. I've also given you my private phone number. Don't let anyone else have it! I figure it'll be

easier for me to arrange what you need, once you've decided how you want to work this. Sorry I can't help on the financial end, but I already spent this month and next month's allowance coming here, and getting a new structural deformation analyser for my home workshop."

Tails looked interested. "Oh? What kind of spacial and spectral resolution?"

"Twenty nanometres, and 3 deci-hertz!" Bulma said proudly.

"Wow! Rotor's one only has a 50 nanometre resolution, though we have 2 deci-hertz frequency, but we only get that by using a poly-plex modal emitter array."

Bulma frowned. "Wait, a poly-plex array? That close a frequency spacing would disrupt the phase harmonics."

There was a look of sudden realisation on the fox's face. "Oh, you must be using a linear frequency function. Our's compands the frequency pattern with a tertiary anti-phase mode and shoves each harmonic through a different line."

"But that means..." Bulma slapped her forehead. "So obvious! Orthogonal patterns in each line, so they don't interfere! If we can apply it to Capsule Corps models, we could double, maybe even triple the resolution! That's brilliant!"

The young fox shrugged. "Can't take credit for it, I came across it while reading an old data file on scanning techniques back on Mobius."

The announcer was coming out onto the partially repaired stage. Rubble had been removed, the craters had been filled in (usually with the rubble), and new stones had been laid over them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! Now for the event you've all been waiting for! The moment of truth! The championship final of the Tenka'ichi

Budo'kai!"

Tails looked up. "Uh oh! Gotta juice! Have to be there for Goku. I'll see you later, Mei!"

Bulma called after him as he dusted off. "Come talk to me some time! I want to hear more about some of those other bits of Mobian tech you were talking about!"

Tails veered enough to look behind him and nod, then landed behind the barrier at the training hall side of the arena. Puar, the floating cat... possum... whatever, shape-shifter, and Yamcha's faithful companion, trailed after him, eager to rejoin his master. Meanwhile, the announcer was talking.

"It's a classic showdown of age versus youth! Experience versus strength! Normal size versus teeny-weeniness! Who will win!" The announcer was getting so hyped, he was starting to talk in multiple exclamation marks. Back behind the barrier, Kurilin met the young fox, he shot a look past the kit to where the tiger-girl was, staring after him. Then she turned and started talking to Bulma.

"Did you get her phone number?" He chuckled, and drained the last of his beef-bowl.

"Yes. But it's private, so I'm not to tell anyone else!" Tails replied, and required all his speed to avoid being hit by slightly used broth as Kurilin did a classic spit take.

"But... you're nine!" Kurilin exclaimed.

Tails frowned. "Nearly ten, and that doesn't mean I don't know how to use a phone! Gosh, I could build one from scratch, given a couple of minutes and some gear."

"That's not what I meant!" Kurilin replied. He was wondering how anyone exposed to Master Roshi's taste in fine literature during their mid-day school sessions could remain that innocent.

"Then what did you mean?" Tails looked genuinely puzzled. "We kinda got side-tracked talking about her equipment. She liked some of my suggestions about it. She wants me to meet up later with her and show her some things I learned about back on Mobius."

"Buh... buh..." Kurilin's mouth was trying to re-connect to his brain, but was pretty much getting a busy signal.

"Anyway, the real reason I got Bulma's the number is that she's going to help get some Capsule Corps gear to transport the water. So I need to have a way to contact her. Explaining Mobian technology is really just an extra."

"Oh... OH! Yes, of course." Kurilin finally caught up with the rest of the universe. Fortunately, Goku was just heading out the door, having put down his last bowl, thus providing a distraction. "Hey! Goku! Good luck!"

Tails turned to face him. "Yeah, We're both rooting for you!"

"Thanks!" Goku was practically bouncing up and down, beaming as if he'd just won an free pass to an all you can eat buffet. "It's gonna be awesome, having a chance to fight someone this good!"

The two fighters faced off outside as the announcer checked they were both ready.

Jackie Chun took a modified crane stance. "No holds barred lad!"

"You said it!" Goku responded eagerly.

"Ready..." The announcer bounded back off the flagstones. "Let the championship... Begin!"

Jackie Chun powered forward, catching the very last syllable of the announcer's words in his teeth, it seemed, but Goku had already jumped high. But the old master simply landed and jumped after him,

overtaking the youngster and catching him with a rising flying kick before he could turn to block.

Goku went flying out of the arena as the older man rebounded and landed back inside the ring, however before he'd gone at all far, his tail spun up, and he tail-coptered back. He landed opposite the old master with a cocky grin.

"Forgot about that, didn'tcha! I ain't gonna be that easy! I was wonderin' I could use a Kamehameha blast to fly, but I figured since I only just got it back, my tail needs the exercise."

That got the old man riled up. They ended up trading Kamehamehas, which met in the middle of the arena, and blew each other out. Jackie Chun looked gob-smacked, while Kurilin and Tails were cheering wildly, along with the part of the crowd that hadn't dived for cover.

"What's your next attack! This is fun!" exclaimed Goku happily.

"Rrrr! Just for that I'm going give you a taste of... this!" Jackie Chun shimmered in the characteristic flicker of a shadow attack.

"C'mon old timer! I've seen this one!" Goku spun and struck where the old master should appear. "You gotta be... here!" The blow smashed into the place where the old master had re-appeared... only to have that figure flicker too.

"Sorry son!" Jackie Chun had appeared at Goku's back, and now kicked him full force into the training hall retaining wall's one remaining pillar (try saying that three times fast). It fell on Goku, burying him in rubble. Kurilin freaked, but Tails seemed quite calm.

Jackie Chun made a victory sign. "Ni-ju-san-zoo-ken! Double Shadow Attack! Tell the fat lady she's on!" He turned to the announcer. "Well, start the count!"

As the announcer got to three, the rubble stirred, and Goku exploded from it, landing and brushing himself off as the crowd once again cheered and applauded. "My turn!"

Tails nodded, looking pleased. "Considering the density of the stone, and the mass of the pillar, there was no way that was going to even slow him down!"

Goku shimmered, and reappeared, and reappeared again.

"Monkey see, monkey do, eh? You'll have to do better than just copy my moves!" He struck at the third image, only to have it flicker out, as Goku descended from above and lamped a double fist strike into the back of his head. The old master's eyes bugged out, and he went flat on his face.

"Triple shadow attack!" Goku exclaimed, fists raised as if holding a banner. "You like it?"

"You little ingrate, clobbering your old master's head..."

Goku looked confused, "But my master's the turtle guy..."

"Ack! You must have hit me harder than I thought..." The older guy back-pedalled frantically. "But enough wacky misunderstandings, boy. You've got a great master, clearly a paragon of martial arts! But this move you won't be able to copy..."

He suddenly slumped slightly and staggered. He waltzed over to Goku, hiccuping and giggling, as the announcer speculated that maybe he'd been at the sake before the match. His progress ended in a sway that came out of no-where, and ended up in an elbow smacking down on Goku's head.

"It's the Sui-ken! The phony drunk attack!" called out Yamcha. "Don't get fooled!"



Goku tried to strike back, but the older martial artist's movements were totally unpredictable, with him swaying or stumbling out of the way of Goku's attacks, and seemingly accidentally into ones against the young sai-jin. They took their toll, leaving Goku wobbling and clearly the worse for wear.

'Hmm... Let's see a kid who never been drunk copy this...' Jackie Chun was thinking, as he went in for the final assault, slurring out, "Now le's seddle this 'ere fight, huh?"

Goku turned and ran, whining. It turned into a growl, and he turned round, teeth bared and drooling. He charged forward like a wild animal, tail lashing, giving off the vibes of a rabid predator, and even the old master had to flinch as he leapt.

That was enough for Goku to turn his leap into a somersault over his head, and drive a full power kick into the back of it, sending the old guy into the retaining wall, pretty much demolishing the remains. Jackie Chun staggered out, holding his head, and ground out. "What the heck was that?"

"Kyu ken, Mad Fury attack!" beamed Goku, making a V sign. The bearded guy face-faulted, then flipped back up when he realised how vulnerable he was.

"That means Mad Dog! You've got your martial arts words all wrong!"

The ding-dong battle had turned into more of a cuckoo one, as the sun started to set, and the moon started to rise... both semi-finals had taken considerable time, as had the repairs to the ring. However, from the crowd who were chanting Goku's name, and the announcer praising his skills, Jackie was clearly the only one who cared about correct names.

"No-one guessed this youngster had a chance when he entered the 'Strongest Under the Heavens tournament! But not only has he heroically battled and beaten friend and foe, he now seems to have

an upper hand on the older, bigger, and more experienced Jackie Chun!" With exclamation marks like that, it had to be the announcer.

Goku continued his animal impressions, with a monkey act. And it certainly made a monkey out of Jackie Chun as he found himself on the end of wacky, unpredictable attacks with clawed hands and tail.

As Goku jumped back, grinning, the old master took a stance and started waving his hands in the air. "Getting a little cocky? Okay then, this time for sure..."

Tails was as mystified as everyone else what Jackie Chun was up to, until he started chanting, "Rock-a-bye baby... On the tree top..." Goku, who was looking right at the other, started blinking and yawning. Tails caught the edge of whatever it was Jackie Chun was doing, and felt a wave of dizziness pass over him. "... when the wind blows the cradle will rock..." Goku's eyes closed, and he slumped, face first on the floor.

"Hah! Min-min-ken, the nighty night attack!" Jackie preened.

"But... I'm not sure that counts! Hypnosis isn't really a martial art!" The announcer said.

"It has a fancy name, doesn't it?" exclaimed Jackie. "Just count!"

As the count started, Tails was yelling, along with half the audience, for Goku to get up. But nothing seemed to work. Tails knew from experience how heavy a sleeper the sai-jin could be, in fact the only thing that could wake him... He glanced at the empty bowl Goku had left behind. Kurilin caught his glance and his eyes widened in sudden surmise. Tails grinned and nodded.

As the count reached four, they yelled out, "Goku! Dinner time!" beating out Bulma, who had just started to have the same idea.

The sleeping martial artist sprung up, looking around himself. "Huh, what where? Where's dinner!"

"You have a match to win first!" called out Tails. Jackie Chun was fuming.

"Oh yeah... better finish fast..." As he spoke, Goku finally looked in the direction of the rising moon, and stopped speaking. His eyes glazed over and fur started to sprout.

"Gahh! I forgot!" cried out Yamcha. "His tail..."

(I think it's time for some more mood music 'Sonic 2 Boss Music Orchestra Remix' [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=QJumqm9\\_jz4](https://youtube.com/watch?v=QJumqm9_jz4))

Tails's eyes widened as Goku transformed into his Osaru (giant monkey) form. He didn't need to be a genius to pull the pieces together from Goku's Dragonball quest tale, and Yamcha's reaction. "He was the one that destroyed Pilaf's castle? He turns into a giant monkey when he has a tail and sees the full moon? Oh no, he was the one that destroyed his grandfather's home?"

Kurilin gulped. "What!"

Yamcha nodded, "Yeah! He doesn't remember who he is in this state, when he sees a full moon, he's just a a raging monster! Puar! Turn into a sword and I'll try to remove his tail!"

"Uh huh!" The little floating cat... possum... shape-shifter, started to change.

"That'll fix him?" Tails asked. The monster had finished roaring defiance at the skies, and started moving. He ripped the peak off the training hall, and flung it off into the distance, debris scattering down on the stands.

Tails reacted without thinking, going into Tail-propeller mode and zipping up to intercept each piece of stone and flick it away from the vulnerable crowd, who were panicking. But the monster saw him, and started to step forward, reaching out, his giant foot about to come down on the stands where Bulma, Mei, and Oolong were.

Tails dived under it, and Tailspin attacked upwards at full power into the sole, unable to hurt it, but stinging it enough that the monster stepped back instead. Unfortunately it stepped on Jackie Chun in the process. He'd just removed his shirt, maybe to fight it, but the massive foot pounded him face first into the floor before he could act.

Tails worried about that for a second, then realised that assuming Goku's Osaru body was anything like normal flesh, and Jackie Chun was at least as tough as Goku, he'd probably be embedded in the flagstones, but not suffer anything more than bruises. Besides he had his own worries.

The crowd was frozen in shock, but any second now they were going to panic and run for the exits. People were going to get trampled. And the announcer wasn't being any help, instead diving for cover.

"Wahhhh! You're not going to win by crushing the referee!"

Someone had to act, and he was possibly the only person in position to do so. The whole train of thought had been a high speed mag-lev, so he was still rebounding from his Tail-spin attack as he went into action. He zipped past the announcer, snatching the microphone.

"Sorryi'llreturnitsoon!"

As he zoomed up into it's face, he spiralled and jinked close to the beast's body, accelerating his perceptions the way he instinctively did when he sped up physically. But he made an effort to keep his voice normal as he spoke into the microphone. "Don't worry, we'll stop him from stepping outside the ring! But just to be safe, will people move out of the stands to the exits, front rows first..."

He couldn't spare the attention to look, but the lack of screaming suggested it might have worked. Something he'd learned from watching Aunt Sally, in a crisis, people will tend to obey someone who sounds like they know what they're doing. He wished he had a bi-plane, a fragmented ancient human record indicated you should fight giant monkeys in a bi-plane. Or be a plumber.

The monster was swinging at him, and only by flying right up to Osaru-Goku's face and buzzing around like a furry wasp could he manoeuvre and change position fast enough to evade the massive paws. His twin goals were to keep the monster in one place, and distracted, so that Yamcha could chop off the tail. The thought made him sick to the stomach, the idea of losing one of his own tails was horrifying, but he couldn't see any other choice.

The sky was clear, and there was nothing to block the moonlight, nor any banners big enough to wrap around the monster's head and blind him. The only other method of blinding him made chopping off Goku's tail mild by comparison. But at low power... He dived in and kicked the monster in the eye, making him wince and slap his hands to his face as the flying fox flitted away.

"Yamcha! If you're going to take your shot, do it now!" Tails called into the microphone.

With the monster distracted, he risked flying around the back and seeing for himself. Kurilin was carrying Jackie Chun to the sidelines, as the Osaru had changed position, and Yamcha was already leaping up, Puar-sword raised high... Only to be lashed away by the random wild whipping of Goku's tree-trunk sized tail.

Tails started to dive on the tail himself, but the monster had clearly felt the impact and rounded on them, and Tails was suddenly face to face with it once more, but this time he was holding a straight line course for a second too long. Even with his reactions he barely saw the slap coming. He was sent flying out of the arena by the impact, to land spread-eagled in a tree.

Not only was Osaru Goku insanely strong, it was equally fast. The only thing that might cut off that tail was a Tail-spin attack, at maximum power and with the sharpest, most ki focussed possible edge. But based on it's reactions, even in a power dive, Tails just wouldn't be fast enough. There were fundamental limits to the top speed of a propeller driven aircraft...

Suddenly he had a radical notion. Theoretically it would work, and it didn't require any new abilities, just old ones applied in new ways... if he had a run-up, which would require it being distracted. Then he realised he was in a banana tree. He chopped off a giant bunch of bananas, and dusted off, flying back towards the stadium with the bananas hanging from one hand, and the microphone in the other.

Once again his train of thought had been an express, so in absolute terms only a few seconds had passed. However, there were already a lot of people outside the stands, and they cheered as he overflowed them. The rest depended on, "Kurilin! I need you to keep him pinned, distract him! I've got a shot at fixing this, but I need a run-up!"

Thankfully as he overflowed the upper stands, he could see the young monk was still up, and moving around, as was Namu and Yamcha, though Puar was nowhere to be seen. Between the three of them, they'd managed to keep it's attention away from the stands. Tails threw down the bunch of bananas to Kurilin. "This'll help!"

(Time for a change of pace... 'Sonic the Hedgehog (SatAM) - Unused Adventure Theme' - [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=NyqR6f5Wz-I](https://youtube.com/watch?v=NyqR6f5Wz-I))

Then he took off, boosting up to his best tail-propeller sprint speed, cranking his tails as hard as possible, away from the arena. It got hard to see due to the airflow, and he decided he would buy or make himself a decent pair of goggles as soon as possible, while diverting a small amount of ki into forming a fairing in front of his head to deflect it to either side, a tweak of his Tail-spin attack's saw edge.

He ran over the calculations in his head, the geometry... it had to work. He was at his limit, propeller blades would drive him no faster, which was why he untwisted his tails, stretched them out behind him, and braced them, while forcing the ki flowing through and around them into new shapes. "It's juice and jam time!" He muttered, unaware the microphone was still picking him up, protected by the ki fairing. "Let's do it, to it!"

Wham! He suddenly felt the acceleration as he powered forward. The shift almost made him lose focus, but he recovered barely in time to sustain the boost. Looping in a wide turn, he headed back towards the arena, now almost a kilometre away. He concentrated as he never had before on wringing every measure of speed out of his new technique, adjusting the geometry on the fly in line with what his senses and engineering intuition were telling him.

He could feel the ki energy flowing out of him, the new technique had been energy intensive, and was leaking power like a sieve, but he'd only need to sustain it for a few seconds... The stadium exploded in front of him, thankfully from a rapid approach rather than Osaru Goku wrecking it, and he narrowed his perceptions, focussing on his target.

Those people who were looking up saw a golden comet blaze across the stadium from the direction of the training hall, trailing twin contrails of gold washed vapour. Those with fast enough perceptions would have seen it turn into a golden disk as it sliced across the rear of the giant monkey with an unpleasantly organic sound. However this was drowned a fraction of a second later by the thunderclap as the sonic boom it was generating caught up with it.

The Osaru reached for the heavens with one final roar, but it was already shrinking and losing hair. It reduced down to a naked kid with spiky hair, curled up and asleep on the ravaged arena floor. As audience members started to filter back into the stadium, an orange furred figure dropped down towards the ring in tail-copter mode.

However, if his previous motions had the precision of a hummingbird, this was more like a shot up bomber making an emergency landing. He veered from side to side, dropped, staggered and finally landed on the arena edge at a fast walk, stumbling several steps before coming to a halt.

The microphone picked up his first words. "Did anyone get hurt?"

Kurilin was checking the slumbering form of Goku, and looked up. "No, the stands weren't touched. And Jackie Chun's just unconscious."

"And Goku?"

"He's fine, sleeping like a baby..." The youngster made a liar of Kurilin by yawning and stretching. "Well he was."

Tails exhaled a massive sigh of relief and sagged. "Thank goodness! You guys were awesome, you kept him right where I wanted him."

"You weren't too bad yourself! What the heck was that technique, and why didn't you use it before?"

Oddly enough, the audience was fairly quiet. It was clear most of them wanted to know the same thing. The young fox smiled, though he was looking rather glassy eyed. "Just made it up. Needs a lot of work still. A basic application of aerodynamic theory, applied to the ability of my tails to manipulate air flows via ki energy. I used them as jet engines, twin highly dirigible, high-bypass, aero-spike ram-jets to be precise. Gave me enough speed to approach for a maximum power Tail-spin attack."

Kurilin shook his head. "Well however you did it, it worked!"

Tails noticed the announcer approaching them, and held out the miraculously undamaged microphone. "I guess this is yours. Sorry, but people were about to panic. Someone would have gotten hurt."

Yamcha and Namu were approaching, and that reminded Tails of something else. He pulled the souvenir brochure from inside his jacket, swaying slightly. "Could you all sign this, and make sure it gets back to Mei. I did promise."

"I'll take care of it." responded Kurilin, kindly.



"Ah... good... that seems to be everything..." and with that Miles 'Tails' Prower, Tenka'ichi Budo'kai semi-finalist, genius engineer and all around big darned hero, slumped forward into Kurilin's arms in a dead faint.

**Authors Notes:** Hopefully people enjoyed that. I know I did, even if the aftermath was a bugger to write. Hopefully people won't be too mad about the divergence in the middle to describe the final, or the fact I haven't resolved it. The story is about Tails after all, but I felt I needed to lead up to the Osaru transformation.

In the Dragonball canon, Master Roshi resolves things by taking out the moon with a Kamehameha blast. Here, things worked differently, and it's going to have a knock on effect. Next time, we find out who won, and if Namu's village gets their water. Please review and tell me if you're enjoying this version of Tails.

# Red Ribbon versus Orange Tails

## Chapter 11 - Red Ribbon versus Orange Tails

Tails stirred, and snuggled into his pillow. He mumbled, "Ummm... That was one weird dream. Scary, but kinda cool though, getting to be the powerful one, the hero, helping everyone rather than sitting on the sidelines..."

It was cold, and he must have thrown the covers off, so he curled up and brought up his tails to wrap tightly over his body. Sally would probably wake him up soon, so he was going to get every moment of lie-in time he could, even though he felt ravenous.

"Tails? Hey Tails!" The voice brought him out of his drowsy state, and he sat up. Kurilin was there, dressed in his old monk's outfit. He was on a bench inside the training hall, which was rather better ventilated than before, since it was minus the central tower.

"Oh my gosh! It really happened!" One part of him felt a crushing disappointment that he wasn't back home in his bunk, but it faded quickly to the dull ache he'd learned to ignore, and there was another part that actually felt... good?

He'd really done all those things, proven to himself that when the refuse hit the air conditioner, he could do the sort of things Sonic could. Taking down the Dimensional Vortex Generator hadn't been a fluke, and this time he hadn't messed up. However, he felt battered. "My \_fur\_ hurts! The tips of my follicles ache, and that isn't even physiologically possible! Well at least it's over."

He noticed that Goku and Yamcha were there, clearly having a conversation until he'd woken up, and Namu had been meditating. Now they were coming over.

"Yep!" Kurilin replied, neutrally. "You'll be happy to know that you, I, Namu and Yamcha have all been disqualified for interfering in a match. Our names will be taken out of the register, and Bacterian and Giran have taken third and fourth place."

"Huh? That's crazy!" Tails exclaimed, sitting bolt upright. "I guess we did... but if they're going to punish anyone, it should be me! I was the one who started things..."

Puar, who was floating by Yamcha's head, exclaimed, "You're saying Master Yamcha didn't do anything!"

The pleasure Tails had felt at having accomplished something had drained away, leaving a hollow, empty pit in his stomach. "No! That's not what I meant! I saw how you three were keeping...", he glanced at Goku, not wanting to talk directly about cutting his tail off without apologising first. "... things in the ring! Gosh, you and Yamcha almost fixed things without more than a distraction from me. I couldn't have succeeded without your help, all of you! I just meant that since I was the one that started things, I should take the blame."

He turned to Goku. "Please, tell me when you woke up you went out there and beat Jackie Chun..." Goku's apologetic expression stopped him in his tracks, and his shoulders slumped. "... no."

"I'm real sorry! But I was really hungry when I woke up, and the old timer still had a lot of fight in him. Still, it was a great match! Maybe if I hadn't lost my tail again..."

Tails looked like he'd just been punched in the gut by Goku's Osaru form. He barely glanced at Namu, then jumped up and dashed past them all across the training hall and into the bathrooms. He hung his head over a washbasin, feeling light headed and dizzy. To his horror, he found himself crying, and unable to stop.

"Whoa! I didn't think he'd take it that hard!" Goku exclaimed. "We gotta go make sure he's okay!"

They found him still with his head hung over the basin, crying as if his heart was breaking, in between sobbing gulps of air.

"Hey... hey... Tails? What's wrong?" Kurilin asked, comfortingly.

"I'm what's wrong! I tried so hard to help, to be strong enough, good enough! But even when I try to save people I end up hurting others!" He turned to face them with a loud snuffle, and grabbed a towel to wipe across his face.

"No wonder Sally and Sonic never wanted me on their missions! All I do is mess up! Robotnik should have done one useful thing in his life and dumped me in deep space where I wouldn't hurt anyone else!"

All of the others looked shocked at this.

"Whoa!" Goku exclaimed. "What're ya talking about!"

Tails sniffed again and started counting off on his fingers.

"One, I got you all disqualified, and I know Kurilin and Yamcha have been working so hard to be able to say they fought in the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai. Two, I made a promise about Namu's village and dragged everyone into it, and now it's all gone to pieces."

"Three, I was the one who cut off Goku's tail, and made him too weak to win against Jackie Chun, so I'm directly responsible for both losing him the title, and the money we needed. Have I missed anything out?"

"Uh... the bit where you saved those people in the audience, and stopped a panic, and pulled an epic plan and some awesome moves out of your tails?" Kurilin said.

He continued. "Look, there's only one thing you said that's right, and that was the start. The whole ban thing is crazy, even if it is only for this tournament. Do I look bothered? Does Yamcha? Heck, it gives

me a nice warm glow to know you expected me to back your play without having to stop and explain!

"We fought, and we know what our rankings are, and we're proud of what we did, and no bunch of old fogies are going to make us feel bad about helping people because we technically broke one of their rules, and because there's no way they could ever be that awesome! The only reason I told you was because I figured you could do with a laugh!"

Tails looked marginally happier. "You mean it?"

Kurilin nodded. Yamcha took a few seconds longer to nod in agreement, but it was emphatic when he did.

Goku jumped in. "You took off my tail? Why? I'd just got it back!"

"I didn't have a choice, I couldn't cut off your sight of the moon... there was nothing big enough to wrap..." Seeing Goku's non-plussed look he asked. "They did tell you what happened, didn't they?"

Yamcha was behind Goku but in Tails's line of sight, and started waving his hands as if to say stop talking.

"Yeah, I fell asleep again, and a monster appeared and wrecked the place. Darn, it's always when I'm asleep, like at Pilaf's castle. Sounds like it'd be a really cool thing to fight, besides I owe it for my grampa."

It didn't take a genius for Tails to see why they hadn't told him last time, after all they must have figured with his tail removed it would never happen again, but something had to be done, his tail could regrow, hopefully it would, and there might not be anyone around who knew how to stop him next time. Besides it had been recorded...

"Guys, Goku's got to know enough to protect himself. There may be no-one else around who can deal with the monster next time it

appears, so Goku will have to make sure it doesn't happen. I can easily build him a pair of goggles with a coating that will block out moonlight, or at least reduce it's intensity well below that of the full moon, but his tail will almost certainly grow out again. I hope so, at least..."

"Huh?" the young sai-jin asked. "I don't understand. Besides, I can take any monster, ever!"

Tails sighed. "If you were awake. The thing they're not telling you is, it's linked. When you have a tail, and see the full moon, you fall asleep, and the monster appears." He saw Yamcha relax, at least slightly.

"I'm the one... But that means, grampa..."

Tails chopped off the other youngster's train of thought before it could reach a terminus. "No! You're not responsible, you didn't know, and you were unconscious the whole time. Besides, from what you said, at Pilaf's castle, summoning the monster saved you, and Yamcha and Bulma, even if you did it by accident."

"But gramps always said I shouldn't look at the full moon."

"But he didn't tell you why? He must have known." Tails seemed to have forgotten his own unhappiness, as he did his best to 'Bunnie' through helping Goku.

"Your grandfather was a good man, and a great fighter, he must have been to teach you the way he did. But he made a mistake. I've had it happen to me enough times, someone not telling me about something because I'm not ready, too young, wouldn't be able to handle it."

The young fox shook his head, his bangs shaking, and unconsciously brushing a hand over one of his tails as it curled around in front of him. "That's probably why no-one told you after Pilaf's, they all knew you'd feel bad about your grandpa, and with

your tail gone, it wasn't going to happen again. I'm not going to make the same mistake.

"Your tail seemed to regenerate when you were in a high stress situation, it makes you stronger. In fact, after I've made you those goggles, let's see if we can trigger it deliberately. Taking one of my tails would be about the worst thing you could do to me. I didn't want to do it to you, but at the time there was no other way to stop the monster and protect everyone, you included."

Goku looked unhappy, but not angry. "I guess... but if people could get hurt, I don't want my tail back!"

"All you have to do in the meantime is not look at the full moon. The goggles will make sure you don't see it by accident. I'm really sorry, I hope you'll forgive me." He was now hugging his own tails to his front possessively, partly as a barrier against any anger Goku might show, mostly because he felt Goku might ask him to lose a tail. The fact that it was crazy didn't stop him feeling that way.

"Hey, it's forgiven." Goku reached out, and Tails flinched slightly, but the older kid just put his hand on the young fox's shoulder. "Having a tail is cool an all, but I can do okay without it. I'm just sorry I couldn't beat Jackie Chun without one. I should have got that money for your idea."

Tails looked over at Namu, who had been silent the whole time. "I didn't mean to raise your hopes..."

The turbaned warrior held up a hand. "Lads, both of you, stop. You have already done far more for me and my village than I could have asked. I will find some other way to help my people. You, Tails, should listen to your own words.

"You reassure Goku that he has nothing to reproach himself over, and yet you judge yourself by far harsher standards. Do not let the fact that some of your plans did not work to your satisfaction overshadow the good you have done. Though I suspect your great

expenditure of ki, and the stress you have been under, increased the intensity of your earlier outburst."

Tails wiped his eyes with his cuff again, and sniffled, but looked much better. "I guess I did kinda overreact. It's just I've always worried that it's not just that I'm too young, that there was something wrong with me, the reason I wasn't wanted on missions. It's a bit selfish, I know, but I was counting on what I was doing proving otherwise."

He paced off towards where his stuff was, and pulled out his pocket computer, looking at the file Bulma had prepared. "There must be a way! When I build a framistat, If I don't have a left handed framwinkle, I can replace it with a 3/8ths Gripsey. There's \_always\_ more than one way to solve a problem... We wouldn't have needed the fifty million anyway, Kurilin was right. Even five million would hire us two 35000 litre flying tankers, fuel, and pilots for two months to provide a ferry service."

Kurilin frowned, "Uh, what's that in gallons?"

"It's over 9000." stated Tails. "If we had transport..."

"Kinto'un could fly you wherever you want!" said Goku.

Kurilin looked puzzled. "I thought the two of you were off on that Dragonball quest?"

"No, the balls are inert." Tails stated off handedly as he worked through the numbers. "They'll be that way for another two and a half months, based on when they were last used. Okay, just for storage tanks... Um... Shoot! Two self contained 35000 litre storage tanks with integral pumps... 24,000 zeni a month, deposit... 120, 000, and we only have 80 left from my clothing fund, and I don't think we can make it up from what's left over of our savings after paying for coming to the tournament.



"One would be more than enough to provide for the people, and some for the crops, but it'll be a poor harvest. It's a pity we don't have... wait a second! Goku, Kinto'un is a magic \_cloud\_! Can it absorb water like a regular one? If so, how fast?"

"Uh... I never asked! Hey, Kinto'un!" In seconds, the magic cloud zipped in through the roof, and hovered in front of Goku, to the surprise of Namu, who hadn't seen it before. "Can you soak up water?"

The cloud floated upwards for a second, then one end of it moved up and down, as if nodding. "Great!"

Tails was working on his computer. "If Kinto'un could go to the shore, and soak up as much fresh water as it can in a minute from the sea water, then come back and pour it out into those bowls, I can work out just how much it could add. As long as it won't damage itself."

"Okay, Kinto'un, you got that?" The cloud bobbed again at Goku's question, and zipped off through the roof. It only took a couple of moments, and the use of the bathrooms again, since it seemed the little cloud could soak up quite a lot of water, and Tails looked up from his computer with a big smile, and a sigh of relief. "With Kinto'in's help, we can do it! We still need one tank, but we'll have money left over, a little at least!"

"Yeah!" Goku cheered. "Besides, I wanna know how Namu saw through my Shadow Attack. He wasn't even looking at me! Maybe while we're there he can teach me."

Namu smiled. "I will be glad to. If you calm your ki and find your centre, you can distinguish the location of other ki sources, sense another's position, power, even their intent, if you are skilled enough. I will train you as best I can, it is the least I can do."

Tails mused. "Robots don't have ki... at least I don't think they do, but Robians... I'd like to learn that too." He looked around. "I saw

Bacterian and Giran stomp off with their tails in a sling, but where's Jackie Chun?"

"Can't you hear it?" exclaimed Kurilin. "Outside getting his victory prize!"

Now that he was thinking beyond his immediate surroundings, Tails noticed he could hear the crowd outside roaring, and definitely chanting 'Jackie'. However, there was a closer commotion.

"My boyfriend is in there, he'll vouch for me, and I have some important information for Tails! Now let me in or I'll have them both beat the living headlights out of you!" The voice was Bulma's, and she was haranguing a harried looking temple monk. Yamcha gave a look to the others that seemed to say, 'yes, but she's my girlfriend' and went over to collect her.

She glomphed onto the dessert warrior, and gave him an enthusiastic smooch. "You were awesome out there, Yamcha! I'm so proud!"

Then she saw Tails and smiled, waving her computer over her head. "Hey, Tails! Good news! You don't need that smelly old prize money. I just got on to my father, and convinced him that the only reason he still has a daughter and not a pancake is because my boyfriend and his friends were kicking tail... literally!"

"Maybe I couldn't pay for your scheme out of my allowance, but I convinced him that an act of heroism deserves more than you all getting disqualified. Oh you should have heard some of the other spectators, they're not happy at all about that! Anyway, Capsule Corps will provide whatever equipment you need, for breaking that drought, for free!"

"I've got to admit, my dad may be a goof-ball, and a lecher, but on occasion he really comes through. Though I guess the company can write a couple of million off against taxes as a charity donation. Not to mention the good publicity."

"Gosh! Thanks Miss Bulma!" Tails was wide eyed, and for the first time since he woke up looked his age.

"Tails, I think you can call me just Bulma." She smirked. "Oh, and he was also interested in what you know of Mobian technology. Hope you've got some time in your schedule before you go off on your Dragonball hunt for a visit to West city."

"Well I'll be at Namu's village..." Tails consulted the world map that was still up on his own computer. "... but I guess I can commute, maybe weekly. Though I've got to warn you, I haven't actually built any of the really cool stuff. Oh, I've studied the theory, both how they work and how to construct them, even reconditioned salvaged units, but the advanced things like gravity polarisers, holo-projectors or forcefield generators would have taken too many resources, or revealed Knothole.

"Every gram of material had to be salvaged from Robotnik's junk yards, or stolen from his factories, and most of those high energy devices would have put out a power signature that'd have been like sending old blubber-bot an engraved invitation! It took months to collect what was needed for the experimental de-robotisciser.

"Besides, from what I've studied of that tech database, you need some basic tech first, like dura-steel, omni-mimetic alloys, high temperature organo-metallic composite superconductors, graphene sheet deposition and electrophilic super-polymers. I mean without ESPs and graphene, you can't even build molecular stressed storage power cells!"

He huffed at the idea of being stuck with nothing better than chemically based batteries, causing his bangs to flutter. "I can explain the manufacturing processes, but we always salvaged ready made components, or recycled them. I'll do my best, but it may take weeks to build even demonstration units."

Bulma was a bit wide eyed at the fox's words. This was far more than she'd been expecting. If he could make good on even a quarter

of that stuff, the state of the art would jump several notches, with a similar improvement in the awesomeness of the stuff she could invent. Oh, and it would probably make Capsule Corps, already the biggest corporation on the planet, even richer. ""Woah! When you make good on a promise, you don't mess about!"

Tails shrugged, smiling brightly. "I like doing nice things for my friends."

At that moment Jackie Chun entered the training hall, putting away an envelope in his breast pocket. "Ah, I see both of our young warriors have regained their wits!"

"Hiya... I mean hello!" Goku's skull might be denser than neutronium but some of Master Roshi's training in manners, and the other's good examples had stuck. "You were really great! Sorry I couldn't put up a better fight. Come to the next Tenka'ichi Budo'kai and I'll do better."

"Not without some extensive training of my own." The old master said. "I haven't had a battle that close in a long time. Your master would be proud of you, proud of all of you. But I hope it has also shown you that there is no reason to slack off on your training, that there are still stronger people than you out there."

"Oh yeah! I'm gonna train even harder!"

Kuroillin nodded. "Me too. But I'm going to ask Master Roshi if he can help me to learn how to teach properly. I enjoyed teaching."

Tails looked a little glum. "I'll try, but with all the other things I have to do to get home, I won't be able to do it full time. But I'm going to do whatever I can. I know Goku will help me, since we'll be working together for the next few months."

"That's what I wanted to hear." The old master smirked, and ripped the wig off, then winced. "Dangedblastit! That super glue was strong." He recovered himself and put on his trademark sunglasses.

"Master Roshi!" The three Turtle students exclaimed in chorus.

"Yes lads. I felt the best way to monitor your progress was to be there right along side you, without you knowing. I didn't expect things to come quite this far. But you, all three of you have managed to exceed my every expectation. I am proud to call myself your master. Now, go out there, with Yamcha and Namu. I think there's going to be a riot otherwise."

The trio were still stunned, but as Tails walked past, Master Roshi flipped him a capsule. "If you need help with the money side of your scheme, ask, but this storage capsule should help you get started. It should hold a lot of water."

The crowd's mood improved a lot when the group came out, and when it was made clear that none of the participants in the rescue were particularly bothered by their disqualification. They were also happy to hear that Namu's village would get water. Tails made sure to credit all the people who had helped, both with stopping the monster attack and supplying water, remembering what Bulma had said about good publicity.

He also had a chance to hand deliver the fully signed martial arts tournament brochure to Mei before he left, which demonstrated that no matter how good you are at martial arts, you can not evade a full power ballistic glomph by a cute girl. It was also the first time someone other than Aunt Sally had kissed him, and there was nothing funny about this kiss.

The next few months were extremely busy for the young fox, living up to all the promises he'd made. He shuttled back and forth between West City and Namu's village on a weekly basis, by a fast Capsule Corps flyer that was put at his disposal after his first time there. Of course, that didn't mean he was inside all the time.

Experience, a pair of goggles and a tow rope, gave him practice at building and maintaining a ki wind/friction shield at trans-sonic speeds, and building up his endurance and reserves. He went on to

work on ways of bringing down the energy cost of his new 'Deuce Juice' manoeuvre. He called the technique that because it used both tails to 'juice', and the training his 'Juice Ex Machina' regime.

While the energy cost per second remained significantly higher than his fastest tail-propeller speed, the increased speed actually made it more efficient for long distance travel, as he could go several times as far on the same amount of energy, especially as it seemed the power increase tailed off with higher speeds.

He learned little tricks like letting some of the friction heat leak through to keep him warm rather than using ki, and going higher into thinner air, where his jet effect was more efficient, while using the air-compression effect to keep him supplied with oxygen. While he could never complete the 4500 kilometre trip from the village to Capsule Corps headquarters under his own power, he was able to go almost 1000 kilometres at better than Mach 1.5 by the end of it.

He always made his full power runs on the village to Capsule Corps run, as the level of energy expenditure made him massively hungry, and West City could support his appetite better than Namu's village. Not that anyone at Capsule Corps minded the food bills. Tails was as good as his word. For the cost of room and board, and the loan of some flying tankers and crews for a few months, they were getting a liberal education in the technology of a culture several thousand years in advance of theirs.

While he wouldn't discuss weapons, technologies he was fine with, and he did his best to show them how to develop a number of key Mobian materials technologies and engineering techniques. Not all of the Capsule Corps R&D people were happy at first listening to a juvenile fox from nowhere, despite the endorsement of Dr Briefs himself (Bulma's father than been one of the first ones to have an extended heart to heart, or rather mind to mind talk with Tails.)

In most cases, this reluctance lasted about as long as it took for Tails to start discussing his knowledge. The mindset of an organisation is set by it's boss, and Dr Calvin Klein Briefs was first and foremost an

engineer, and like all engineers followed the precept 'Building cool stuff is cool! How can we make even cooler stuff, or make the stuff we have even cooler?

Tails was equally happy. Only Rotor had ever been able to discuss things like this with him, and Nicole to some extent, but both had been too busy with their many other duties to do so much. Now he had a whole group of people who wanted to hear everything he had to say about one of his favourite subjects. On later visits he had access to the full Capsule Corps R&D database (though not Capsule tech itself, that was high security, and even most of the regular R&D staff didn't have access).

He also had access to lab facilities and assistants, as they turned some of the developments into hardware. The super-conductors and any sizeable EPS would require an orbital factory, having no gravity polarisers to provide a free-fall zone, and needing the super conductors to make gravity polarisers, but basic stuff like graphene sheets could be created with existing technology.

One of his first technology demonstrators had been creating a couple of sets of goggles based on his original electro-binocular design, but with a few additions. Light amplification and broad spectrum camera elements gave night vision, they could act as self-organising spread spectrum com-links with each other, and had an external wireless interface so they could display data from an external computer or scanner unit.

Graphene laminates made them almost unbreakable, and allowed him to deposit a massive amount of processor and memory elements, and layer it with microscopic molecular stressed storage power units which could charge off incident daylight above a certain level, also acting as sun glasses. It took most of a week to build the machines to make them, and a dozen pairs of goggles. Linked earpieces were made both over-the-ear, for humans, and side-ear, for furry people, most of whom had forward facing ears.

Of course, no-one complained when he snagged two pairs for himself and Goku. He added some special software to Goku's that would blank out the moon on the interior displays if it was anything more than three quarters full, and shift to night vision mode automatically, blanking out the polarised moonlight frequencies.

At Namu's village, his time was split between making sure the water deliveries went alright, a minor task as the pilots were competent and knew their jobs, training with Goku and Namu, and learning from Namu how to use their other senses, especially their ki sense.

Goku acquired the technique with ease, but Tails had more difficulty, though he did well at learning to rely on his purely physical senses. He eventually managed to learn it after a fashion, but it was erratic, and unreliable. He thought maybe it was because he didn't understand it properly.

He determined that when he had a chance he'd see if he could devise a method of detecting ki mechanically. After all, if someone as out of tune with the natural world as Robotnik could come up with a gadget that could drain life-force, surely Tails could come up with something to scout out it's presence and strength.

Goku and Tails were both treated as heroes by the village. The place reminded the kit of Knothole, a small tightly knit community, with one exception, kids his own age! He and Goku quickly became friends with Namu's youngest brother Dabu, and through him several of the other children.

It helped that the prototype goggles were finished a few days before the next full moon, and when tried out, worked out perfectly, at least so far as blocking Goku's sight of the moon, whether it would fix his transformation would have to wait until his tail grew back in. Unfortunately, it hadn't yet, even in his most intense sparring with Namu and Tails.

Their heroic status was redoubled, when towards the end of their stay, Goku and Tails discovered the real reason for the drought. The



rains had come, but the river wasn't flowing. It turned out Giran's village had damned it well upstream, and were hoarding the water for their own use. A few stern words, and a Kamehameha to the dam, restored the status quo.

The two young heroes were almost sad to leave when the Dragonball radar finally started to ring... well the spare did, Tails had used some spare lab time to built a duplicate that could feed HUD style data to their goggles and had alert functions. Bulma had, after all explained her design back when they first met.

They said their farewells, to Namu and the villagers, and received a large supply of food for the first part of their journey (the harvest had been a bumper one, thanks to an adequate water supply and a lot of hard work). Both had helped out with the harvest, something Tails at least had experience of, and Goku, from his previous experience of Master Roshi's techniques was quite happy to accept as training.

As they rose up on Goku's cloud, Tails was examining his pocket computer. He'd overlaid the detected dragon-ball co-ordinates on a world map. Tails was in his Kame uniform, but with a Capsule Corps logo baseball cap he'd picked up from Bulma, modified for fox ears. He also had his capsule case, and a few items he'd tinkered up in his pockets. Goku had his old tunic and trousers on, and carried his magic extending staff, Nyio-bo. Both of them wore their goggles, but up on their foreheads for now.

"Okay, Goku, which one do we go for first? The nearest is almost due north, an area called the Karrin wild-lands, and the next nearest is the one to the west, pretty near where the Kame house is, but I've zoomed in and the map shows just water, so I'll need to build us a submarine..."

"Naw, we'll just go for the north one first!" Goku stretched his arms and laced his fingers together, working out the kinks. "I could do with some wild lands, it's nice meeting so many people, but sometimes you just want to run around."

Tails smiled, memories of running through the Great Forest with Sonic springing to mind. "Gosh, now you mention it, I could do with some of that myself. North it is."

The first part of the journey was over the dessert, but Kinto'un protected them from the effects of exposure, the same way it did from apparently travelling at trans-sonic speeds. After an hour or so, the terrain turned to grasslands, then a band of quite pleasant looking inhabited countryside with farms and fields and towns of the ubiquitous dome shaped houses, linked by well travelled roads.

Beyond that, they came to uplands, steep hills and valleys where signs of civilisation faded, and ceased. But it wasn't until they reached the edge of a wide forest, hidden within a massive basin in the mountains, that they began to feel at ease, Goku reminded of the mountains he grew up in, and Tails of the Great Forest.

They were still several hundred kilometres from their objective, but Tails pulled down his goggles and turned to Goku. "Not to run down Kinto'un, but it's been so long since I saw two trees that close together that I'm feeling homesick, and a need for speed, on my own two feed... feet."

Goku laughed. "Race you!" He pulled down his own goggles and switched them on (they were pre-set to dragon-ball tracker mode). Then he jumped from Kinto'un.

"No fair!" Tails called out, without any real heat as Kinto-un was effortlessly keeping up with it's master. He bounded off and powered down towards the other in a burst of tail-prop flight, before switching to the same running, leaping and bounding mode as his friend.

Their progress was nowhere near as efficient, less than that of a speeding car, rather than that of a trans-sonic jet aircraft, but they were having fun. They switched the lead several times, both cheating outrageously, Goku with boosts from his extending staff, Tails with tail-propeller bursts.

As they dashed through the forest, Tails felt content in a way he hadn't for over a year. He could so easily see this as the Great Forest, and the spiky haired silhouette ahead of him as... he came to a stop, along with the thought. Goku had become a close friend, maybe closer than any-one but Sonic, and Tails was going to miss him badly after being wished home.

However, he wasn't Tails's big bro. There were a lot of similarities, the cocky, always upbeat attitude, the carefree grin, the feeling that as long as he was around, things would work out, but he wasn't the blue blur that Tails had grown up with. So Tails had better stop imagining him as a sort of substitute, it wasn't fair on Goku, or him. Tails shook his head to clear it.

He shrugged, if Goku wasn't Sonic, that didn't stop him being a darned good friend. There was one other good thing, Goku treated him as a full partner, no reservations or allowances made. Hopefully, that meant Tails would be able to be more of a partner to Sonic, rather than a sidekick when he returned, the way Bunnie or Rotor were. He set himself, he was going to have to juice to catch up...

His newly Namu trained senses picked up something over the susurrus of the forest, a sound that didn't belong, a sound of... a cry?

"Com, Goku. Hey, get back here! I think I hear something... someone in trouble!"

Over the earpiece of his goggles he heard Goku say, "Tails? Oh, yeah, the talkie thing. Huh, what..."

"Just follow the goggles, and as quietly as possible!" he pulled out his pocket computer, and triggered a beacon using the same scrambled, spread spectrum signal as their goggle communicators, that would show an arrow on Goku's display pointing him towards Tails.

He was already moving, quietly but quickly, ears pricked up and twitching to home in on the sound. Goku quickly caught up with him, and together they approached the source of the sound. It became clearer.

"A dragon-ball, you little brat! About yay big, orange, has stars in it!" The voice was a man, rough and nasty.

"I don't know anything about a ball, but my father won't let you take anything from Karrin Sanctuary!" The second voice was a child's and scared, but defiant. "He's the Guardian, and..."

This was interrupted by a slap, a cry of pain, and the first voice saying, "... he'll be dog-meat, just like you if you try to smart-mouth the Red Ribbon army!"

The two were heading towards the confrontation at full speed, Tails wishing he'd thought to build a camera drone he could send ahead of him. Seconds later they burst into a clearing where a dozen men stood around, some wearing fatigues and forage caps, others leather jackets and aviator helmets, but all marked somewhere with badges showing a red bow-tie shaped symbol with an R in each bow.

Most of them were holding rifles, a couple combat knives, and there were a pair of khaki painted hover-bikes parked in one corner, both with the RR symbol on, each mounting twin heavy machine guns.

The apparent leader was a big wolfhound in fatigues and a Stetson, wearing a sergeant's stripes. His victim was a small, black haired boy, no more than six years old, in Amerind style clothing and with a single eagle feather in his hair. The sergeant was holding the kid up by the front of his collar, and threatening him with the extended claws of his free hand. A reddening welt on the boy's cheek showed where he'd already been hit with the paw itself.

Goku and Tails were prepared for a fight, and this sent both of them into full combat mode. Having sparred together for so many months, they were adept at reading each others reactions, so it only took a

blindingly swift exchange of rock-paper-scissors (Tails won, Goku always led with rock) to decide who'd rescue the kid.

Tails just dived right across the centre of the clearing, going into a Tailspin buzz-saw that zipped between the thug and the boy, neatly shearing off the claws, but with enough backspin to stop short of doing the same to the bad guy's gripping arm. That got a swift punch in the inner elbow that made his hand spasm open, dropping the kid.

Tails came effortlessly out of his Tailspin to kick off from the guy with both feet, scooping up the falling boy and flying at full tail-propeller mode for the tree-line. The fact that one running-shoe clad foot had slammed into the wolfhound's jaw on the kick off, snapping his head back, was entirely intentional.

Goku had wasted no time storming in and starting to reduce the odds. Before they could even react, one goon was grabbed by his belt buckle and used as a blunt instrument against a second, and both unconscious forms were thrown off to one side. Another thug got a swift kick in the back of the knee that dropped his arm into throwing range. Wham! That foe to hit the floor and ceased to be a problem.

The other soldiers were just beginning to realise something was happening, yelling, raising their guns and turning to face the threat... which meant they were facing away from where Tails had put down the kid in the undergrowth. He dived out of it, zig-zagging back towards the clearing, and slammed a bludgeoning Tailspin Attack right into the thickest part of the bad guys.

Tails bounced back and forth like a pinball, using goons as pegs, and nicely disrupted any chance of an attack on Goku. The sai-jin was taking care of business his own side of the clearing, and clearing was the word. His opponents might have guns, but they didn't get a chance to use them.

One of the flying-helmet clad goons panicked, and dashed for one of the cycles, but Tails saw him break for it and leaped over head, using

tail-propeller power to land on the seat ahead of him. The thug remembered he had a gun, and tried some nickel-jacketed negotiation, but by the time the stream of automatic fire passed over the hover-cycle seat, Tails wasn't there.

The fox dived under the line of fire, driving one gloved fist into the man's solar plexus, while the other grabbed the magazine and squeezed. The gun jammed, and in a way that wouldn't blow his hand, or the goon's head, off. A swift upper cut made sure the guy wouldn't be getting up any time soon.

As the goon fell over backwards, the wolfhound was revealed, surrounded by his unconscious squad. He'd finally recovered himself, and was turning to face Tails, raising a massive 50 calibre revolver... Then his eyes glazed over and he collapsed forward, showing that Goku was riding him down, having just completed a double fist to the back of his neck.

"What a push-over! I was hoping for some action to work out the kinks, but these guys didn't even qualify as a warm-up!"

Tails pulled his fingers through his bangs. "Who are these Red Ribbon army guys? I saw some army people when they visited Capsule Corps, and none of them looked anything like this. Besides, an army is supposed to protect people, not threaten them."

The young boy Tails had saved was emerging from the bushes, hesitating a few seconds, then squaring his shoulders and approaching them.

Goku waved. "Hiya! You know anything about these guys?"

"No... I was practising tracking when two of them appeared on those flying things and chased me into the rest. You were both really strong! I want to be strong too, just like my father, but I wasn't strong enough to stop them."

Tails nodded. "We heard you. You were being really brave though. Is your face okay?"

The kid rubbed at the bruise. "It hurts, but I'll be alright. Oh, I'm Upa, son of Bora, the Guardian of Karrin Sanctuary."

"Tails, and this is my friend Goku." Tails replied. "Let's get these guys dealt with, then we'll go and find your father."

**Authors Notes:** Sorry about the lack of action, and excess of length. Unfortunately, there was more fallout from the tournament arc to wade through than I expected. I know I rushed through Tails being acclaimed a hero by the crowd, but there was just so much else that needed doing. If it helps, go listen to this 'Sonic the Hedgehog (SatAM) - Unused Victory Theme' - [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=YBbTZ3TBVmQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=YBbTZ3TBVmQ) and think the final scene from 'Star Wars IV - A New Hope'.

I promise, there will be much better reasons than saving a few thousand spectators from becoming pate, for Tails to have such a scene. But he's got to work on up from minor acts of heroism to saving entire planets... did I say that? (Hastily hides copy of Star Fox Assault).

As for the fast forward, I could write actual scenes, but it'd take so long, and you've all waited patiently for more action. Some of the paragraphs have an entire chapter worth of story to each of them. I also had to set up some future plot points, and reinforce the fact that Tails isn't just badass, he's a badass bookworm.

Those who know the DB continuity are probably waving your hands in the air and shouting, 'NOOOO! Karrin Tower comes after the other Red Ribbon sagas! So Akira Toriyama has spoken, so mote it be!' Unfortunately, I did the research. Originally Goku sets off from the site of the tournament (and that's a continuity error, because the dragon-balls are down for a year, and it's only been 8 months and a bit, that's how long the Kame Training took)

Look at the DB world map - pojo(dot). He must have headed north-east and fallen asleep, because he wakes up near A4-4, General Silver's camp. Our heroes are starting from C1-2, Namu's village. Of the four dragon-balls who's original locations are identified, A4-4 (General Silver), A4-2 (Muscle Tower), C4-5 (General Blue) and B1-1 (Karrin), Karrin is the closest.

I can't see any reason why they'd do it the hard way. Besides, Besides, blindly copying the manga as 'Dragon ball with extra Tails' would be dull. Hope you'll bear with me while I write the next part of Cerinia Chronicles.



# Tails of Karrin Sanctuary

## Chapter 12 - Tails of the Karrin Sanctuary

Major Motoki was not a happy man. As head of Military Intelligence for the 21st province, he was right in the front line of the war against terror, specifically the Red Ribbon Army. He sat at his desk, reviewing reports, and casualty figures, and it all added up to nothing he could do anything about.

Red Ribbon Industries had been a major technology company, with branches in everything, consumer products, robotics, vehicles, construction, armaments, back when Dr Calvin Klein Briefs had been a back yard tinkerer. Of course the development of capsule technology had been a massive game changer, and the host of other products the good Doctor developed had catapulted Capsule Corps to the top spot on the technology tree.

Red Ribbon had started focusing more on security services and military equipment, areas which were conservative in buying new products, but that couldn't save them. There were rumours of malfeasance, illegal weapons dealing, double parking, and eventually a large chunk of the company had disappeared, using stolen or bootlegged Capsules to take a large chunk of their hardware and manufacturing capability with them.

Since then, they'd reappeared as a terrorist army, appearing across the world and stealing anything that wasn't nailed down. If it was nailed down, they stole the nails too. They struck without warning, attacked without mercy and vanished without a trace. The police didn't have the gear to stop them, and the army couldn't garrison every place they might strike.

There were 43 provinces in the world, and their main base could be anywhere, in any of them. Even with satellite reconnaissance you

needed some idea of where to start. All he could do, all anyone could do, was collect data and try to find a pattern...

His phone rang, and the vision light indicated it had a screen call. They were starting early. The call, when he punched it up, resolved into a police officer, a senior one by his braid. "Major Motoki, Military Intelligence."

"This is Chief of Police Maki, at Peppertown. Our computer said you were the one to communicate with about the Red Ribbon Army."

"Correct. We'll send details to help with the clean-up, and the injured..."

He realised that the policeman was staring at him, confused. "Oh, no, this isn't about an attack. We've captured some."

"WHAT!" The major practically jumped out of his chair. "If this is some kind of joke... how? If you really have them, this could mean a commendation for you and your staff, at the very least."

"Well, I can't actually take credit." The Chief looked slightly embarrassed. "They were actually delivered to us by aircraft, already tied up, with empty weapons strung round their necks."

"Aircraft? Did you get the markings?"

The Chief Maki shook his head again. "It was generating some sort of smoke screen as cover. Wait a second..."

The screen changed to show a view, clearly from a hand held camera. It swung about in a blur, and focussed on a patch of sky. A group of rough looking men in Red Ribbon Army uniforms were bound together with ropes in a big bunch, a Stetsoned wolfhound in the centre. They looked distinctly the worse for wear. The rope lead up from the group to what looked like a cloud, small for the aircraft it must be hiding.

It lowered the men down to a pavement, clearly part of the street in front of the police station, and released the end of the rope, which turned out to have a rock tied to it. It fell and flattened the wolfhound's Stetson. Then it zipped away at remarkable speed. Major Motoki recognised the wolfhound, and a couple of others as known Red Ribbon Army members. "Sergeant Tan!"

"Yes sir." The police officer was back on screen. "That's what our database said too. Wilhelm Vulfsteader, a.k.a. Sergeant Tan. The file notation said to inform you..."

The major nodded. "Absolutely, I'll be over there with a team to take them in custody as soon as possible. Is there any clue as to who did this?"

"Only this." The Chief held a note up to the screen. "It was found attached to them."

'Dear police,

These are some very bad people. They were being very mean to someone, so we stopped them and captured them. Please arrest them and lock them up.

Goku and Tails.'

Neither man was a fan of martial arts, or watched much TV, and so didn't recognise the names. But Major Motoki vowed to investigate. In the mean time, maybe things were turning around at last.

After seeing off the group of goons, Tails was examining a booklet that had fallen out of the pocket of one of them. The two Turtle trainees and Upa were riding Goku's cloud at tree-top level.

"Listen to this! 'Welcome to the Red Ribbon Army! An Orientation booklet. Congratulations on joining the Red Ribbon Army, the world's most evil crime organisation. Under the glorious leadership of

Supreme Commander Red, the Red Ribbon Army will take whatever it wants, including eventually, the world!

You can look forward to a long career of looting, pillaging, rapine and double parking. That is if you obey orders. If you do not obey orders, you will be executed. It is a job for life in the Red Ribbon Army, since if you try to desert, you will be executed. And there is always room for advancement, since if your superiors fail to complete their missions, they will be executed..."

Goku shook his head. "Gosh, these guys sound nuts, just like that Pilaf."

"I guess that's why they want the dragon-balls, to wish that they ruled the world." Tails responded. "Even if we didn't need the dragon-balls to get me home, we'd have to stop them."

"Uh huh." Goku nodded. "Like the old timer said, that's one of the things a martial artist has to do, fight bad guys, and it sounds like these are really bad, bad guys."

Tails was musing, "What I want to know is how they knew the dragon-ball was here in the first place?"

"Maybe they've got a radar too?" asked Goku.

Tails thought for a moment, then nodded. "Yeah! That could be it, it isn't too hard to detect the radiation signature if you have a dragon-ball to experiment on."

Upa was sitting between them. "What are these, 'dragon-balls' you and they were talking about?"

This produced a potted recap of what the dragon-balls were, why Tails needed them, and what they looked like.

"Um... I think my father found one, an transparent orange ball with yellow stars in?"

"How many?" asked Goku.

"Uh, four, I think."

"Neat! The first ball we found is grandpa's!" Goku exclaimed excitedly.

"It belonged to your grandfather?" asked Upa.

"Yep! And it's the only thing I have to remember him by. Hey, you dad will be okay handing it over, won't he?"

"Since it was yours, I don't see why not. But won't you lose it again when you wish Tails home?"

Tails spoke up. "Once we have some balls to experiment on, I'll figure out the characteristic radiation signatures of each ball, and refine the targeting protocol on the radar so it shows which one is which. From what I've seen of how the radar works, it'll be a simple matter of sub-differential harmonic diffraction in poly-ordinal space. Then, when they re-set, Goku can go straight to the right one."

Goku shrugged. "I guess that poly thingy is good too, but I was just going to watch them when they flew off, and jump up and catch the right one."

Tails looked slightly embarrassed. "Yeah, I should have thought of that..."

He trailed off as he heard explosions in the distance.

Colonel Yellow was a very happy man, well actually a tiger. His search for the dragon-ball in the Karrin Highlands had gotten off to a very rocky start. No sooner had he and his troops been air-dropped in (the tree cover made it impossible to land large aircraft, or operate heavy vehicles in the terrain), than he'd started losing contact with scouting parties.

It was ridiculous, entire squads, with automatic weapons, were being decimated so quickly they didn't have time to get off a radio call. And when the bodies were found they were either killed by hand, or with a spear. He'd covered them with hover-bikes and his reserve of jet patrollers, vehicles like a bubble canopied light helicopter, but with a big jet engine at the back, and multiple vertical thrust jets on the underside, rather than rotors. He'd even taken to the air in his own pusher propeller light aircraft, and managed to get sightings of their opponent.

It was a single man, a massively built Amerind brave, who seemed to be able to sneak through the forest at will, only appearing to attack the Red Ribbon soldiers. He could also throw that spear with enough force to punch through the hulls and canopies of the jet patrollers, as the scout patrols soon found out.

But things were turning around. They'd found a massive pillar, and what was presumably the guy's home camp, and found there was someone sharing it with him, his child from the looks of things. They'd ransacked it looking for the dragon-ball, then he'd secretly sent off Sergeant Tan, their best tracker, to hunt the kid down, while he'd massed the rest of his force, and sent off probing forces in the other direction.

The fighter had taken the bait, which had been hard on the scouting parties, but allowed the rest of his forces to encircle, and close in. He'd known that 'Tactics for Dummies' would be a good buy. And to think, he'd almost taken that job advertising breakfast cereal.

Now they had the brave trapped in an isolated copse, surrounded by his entire reserve of hover units, men and off-road vehicles armed with pintle mounted heavy machine guns. They could raze the entire area, and no matter how tough this guy was, he'd go down. He landed his aircraft in one of the clear areas, and took up position with the largest group of Red Ribbon soldiers.

De-capsulising a loud-speaker, he called out. "C'mon out! Or we destroy that entire area! We just want the dragon-ball, and if you

help us find it, we'll let you and you brat live!"

He was lying of course, standing orders from Supreme Commander Red were that anyone with knowledge of the dragon-balls was to be eliminated. But the offer seemed to work. The brave emerged from the trees, spear in hand. He really was huge, half again the size of any of the Red Ribbon soldiers, and muscled like a tree-trunk.

"I do not care about this ball you desire so much, but I am guardian of this sanctuary, and I will not allow it to be plundered by invaders. Begone, or you shall all die!"

Colonel Yellow sneered. "This time it's you who'll be doing the dying! Fire! FIRE!"

The assault rifles opened up first, and several hit, but the bullets just rebounded. Then the brave was moving, and flung his spear even as he dodged the heavier weapons that were hosing his previous position. The spear flew straight and true through the bubble canopy of a jet patroller and the body of it's pilot. It fell out of the sky and exploded.

However, there were plenty of other jet patrollers and hover-bikes covering every avenue of escape, and Colonel Yellow felt confident it was only a matter of time. Then it happened.

A hover bike exploded and two hover patrollers tumbled out of the sky, stability wrecked by the damage the spinning golden disk that had flown through them had done to their verti-jets. Amazingly, the pilots were flung clear, landing in tree branches.

Another figure was wreaking havoc in one of his lines of ground troops, flinging them right and left to collapse in crumpled heaps on the grass of the surrounding sward. A machine gunner on a truck swung his gun to cover the new threat, and the orange disk descended upon him.

It sliced through the barrel of the gun like a buzz-saw, then rebounded between the diver and passenger seat to chop the engine block in half. The disk resolved itself into a fox in a jumpsuit, which proceeded to fly off into the air with his tails spinning like a propeller. He weaved through streams of bullets and sliced through the ring of flying vehicles like a hawk through a covey of pigeons.

The Red Ribbon contingent were firing wildly hitting each other rather than the two seemingly un-hittable enemies. Two spears, each taking out a machine gunner, indicated the brave was back in the fight. With the air vehicles distracted, the fratricidal ground battle, and three unstoppable forces of destruction sweeping through the area, the Red Ribbon force disintegrated away like wet tissue paper.

The survivors soon panicked, flinging away their weapons and heading off into the forest. Colonel Yellow lived up to his colour by deciding this majority had the right idea and bailed, heading towards the brave's camp, where he'd parked his own aircraft. The ground-bound figure appeared in front of him, just a kid, with black spiky hair.

Yellow growled and pulled out his pistol out. But before he could even get it half way, there was a small fist with a massive dose of oblivion on it making contact with his jaw.

With the vehicles wrecked, and the remaining Red Ribbon soldiers fled from the battle ground, Tails zoomed off as Goku stood over Colonel Yellow, and returned carrying Upa. He landed by Goku as Bora approached.

"Father!" Upa jumped out of Tails' arms, and ran over to hug the leg of his massive parent.

"My son, you're safe!" Bora scooped up the child in a one armed hug before lifting him up to sit on one shoulder. "When those invaders said they might harm you..."



"A group of them caught me, but Goku and Tails saved me from them." Upa said, indicating the pair.

He turned to Tails and Goku. "Then I thank you for for my son's life, and your help with these poor misguided fools. I am Bora, and my clan has guarded this place for generations."

"Son Goku! Pleased to meetcha!" Goku stepped up and held out his hand.

Tails just smiled, and nodded. "And I'm Tails. I'm glad we could help."

Bora shook Goku's hand, which was lost inside his own. "Let my son take you both to our camp, and we will eat together, after I bury these folk."

Tails blanched. "Bury, you mean they're dead? But I was very careful to knock them out, or away to a safe landing place before I destroyed the vehicles." He looked around fully for the first time, and saw that some of the soldiers were mangled by bullets, or lying in poses which suggested they weren't getting up. He suddenly looked ill, swaying slightly.

Goku shrugged. "I wasn't out to kill anyone, but I guess I wasn't too careful. Besides, they're bad guys, and they were trying to kill us first."

"They're still people, even if they were evil." Tails responded. He'd managed to steady himself, but he looked downcast. "Besides... I've never killed anyone, never even seen people die until now."

"But what about where you came from? I thought..." Goku looked surprised.

"I knew Freedom Fighters who left on missions, and never came back, but I wasn't there. The one time I fought, I only destroyed robots, and they aren't people. I know the difference, I've dismantled

enough of them. Their hardware has no capability for sentience or free will.

"Robotnik has spent too much time trying to crush any possibility of independent thought in the Robians to allow his own Swat-bots that ability. Robians, that is Mobians like me who were changed into robots do, at least the conversion process leaves cortical structures that exactly map the frontal... " He realised he was leaving his audience behind.

He decided against explaining how Robian processing cortexes seemed to be perfect duplicates in quantum substrates of the equivalent organic brains. Rather than hard wired commands built into the processors they were controlled by over-ride programming in the supporting interfaces. Unfortunately, none of the others would know what he was talking about. Oddly, discussing something technical had helped him regain some stability. He tried to summarise.

"I've never killed people, only destroyed machines, at least until now." He still looked ill at the thought, but not as if he was going to faint, or throw up. "I know we had to stop them, but I thought we could do it without killing anyone."

Bora was examining the nearest bodies. "I do not think you were responsible for any of these. Most were killed by their allies, and the few others are my work... I think."

He shook his head and came over to the young fox. "You have a gentle soul, I can tell. But if you follow the path of a warrior, you must learn to accept that sometimes you will have to kill. Surely, if it was the only way you could protect people you cared about, you would."

Tails was a genius, and didn't take long to quickly come up with an example. He imagined Sonic and the others trapped by Robotnik, with only him free to stop the mad doctor, and only able to hit with some lethal weapon. He took a long moment to speak, before ducking his head in something so tentative to be called a nod.

"Yes, I guess so... no, I could and would. But I wouldn't feel happy about it."

The massive warrior smiled. "A good answer. If you must kill, do it without hesitation, but without hate, or enjoyment. A warrior kills because he has to, not for pleasure."

Goku spoke up, looking confused. "Huh, I never thought about it... but I guess that's pretty much how I always figured. Sometimes you gotta kill the bad guy, so he won't do anything bad ever again."

Tails looked a bit shocked at that, he'd never considered Goku might think like that, but looking at it logically, he had a point. Could you kill, and still be a good person? It wasn't something he'd actually thought about, he'd just picked up the idea that killing was bad. But Goku was one of the nicest, most decent people he'd ever met... This required thought, more than it took to design that automated orbital factory for superconductors he'd done for Capsule Corps.

Bora looked around, and let his son off his shoulders. "Now, as I said, let Upa guide you to our camp, and I will take care of the bodies."

Tails didn't move, head down and eyes closed, then took a deep breath. He might have to work on re-defining some of his most important beliefs, but he already knew what he had to do in this case. "No. Hopefully I'll never need it, but I can't let myself be squeamish about this. I can't risk hesitating at the wrong moment, because if I do, it may be my friends who end up dying, rather than the bad guy."

He looked up, and he looked somehow older. "I'll help, I have a lot of experience of digging. Besides, I'll have to search the bodies for Capsules or weapons. You may be bullet-proof, but there are a lot of people who aren't, and if one of the guys who escaped comes back and digs up a bunch of hardware... I'll turn them over to Capsule Corps the next time we pass West City. Uh... what about the ones I knocked unconscious?"

Bora thought for a moment. "I will remove their weapons, bind them together, and walk them to the edge of the sanctuary. As long as they do not return, I will do nothing more to them."

Tails sighed again, a sigh of relief this time. For now, he had the time to think. "Thank you."

It was late afternoon when they finally reached the camp, and they stayed there for a meal, and to question Colonel Yellow, who had been carried to the camp, and tied to a tree. Tails explained their quest to Bora, and with Upa and Goku's help, about the dragon-balls, and the radar.

Bora held up the orange ball he carried. "So this small ball can grant wishes? No wonder they were so intent on taking it."

"With the other six, yes." replied Tails. "Um..."

Bora smiled, and handed it to Tails. "Have it. My place is here, protecting the sanctuary. If it is kept here, surely others will come looking for it. You will help me by taking it away."

"Yes! One down, six to go!" called out Tails, holding it high to catch the afternoon sun. He put down by his de-capsulised chest, and looked over at the pillar that dominated the camp, a carved stone totem pole that seemed to reach up forever. "I was wondering what that pillar was. I can't believe that anyone could build a free standing stone pillar that high."

"Yeah, it look like it goes up forever!" added Goku. "What's it for?"

"That is the Karrin tower. It is the heart of what my clan has guarded for generations. It is said, that at the top lives a hermit master. He grows the magic beans that will heal any injury, or act as ten days of food. And it is said that if one climbs to the top with their bare hands, he will grant them a sip of the Holy Water that increases their strength many-fold."

"Wow! Have you climbed it?" asked Goku.

Bora shook his head. "Once, when I was much younger, I challenged it, but did not succeed. I know of no-one who has."

"I guess it would be cheating to fly up..." Tails said, looking over at Goku, who was looking at the pole speculatively. The sai-jin shook his head. "So y'get stronger... I'd have a go myself, but I promised to help Tails get home."

"Thanks Goku!" said Tails, knowing what it meant to the sai-jin to pass up a training opportunity. "It shouldn't take too much longer."

There was a groan from the thieving tiger, who was slumped in his bonds. "Uhh. What happ... argh!"

He'd noticed the four of them, and tried to get away, bashing his head and doing little else. "Let me go!"

"Not until you answer some questions!" said Tails, striding over. It looked almost comical, the big tiger pressing back from the little fox. "Why is the Red Ribbon Army after the dragon-balls, and how did you know one was here?"

"You know about the dragon-balls?"

"Well, yes, or I wouldn't be asking!" Tails replied, looking quizzical. "Now tell me!"

Colonel Yellow remembered seeing this kid go through an engine block like a knife through hot butter, and quailed. "I don't know, Commander Red ordered us to find them, I don't know why, something to do with a master plan."

"I know there's one at Headquarters already, it was shown to us at the briefing, and they had this big screen with a world map that showed the locations of the dragon-balls. Each group was sent out to retrieve a different one."

Tails held up his dragon-ball radar, and zoomed it out to maximum. "Like this?"

The tiger's eye brows hit his forehead. "Yes! How did you get access to our system?"

Tails smiled. "Don't need it, this is a self-contained dragon-ball radar. It even relays navigation information to the overlay display in the goggles."

Colonel Yellow suddenly realised several things. He had enough play in his ropes that he could wiggle his hands round so his fingers were over the bonds. This meant he could extend his claws and cut them, if he did it slowly to stop the kid noticing.

Finally, if he could get free and grab that radar device, the dragon-ball and the native's kid as a hostage, he might be able to get to his plane and escape, and have something to bring Commander Red to stop him being executed.

While he worked, he freely answered questions on which groups were going after which balls, and what else he knew about the leaders. All the time, he was refining how he'd move once the last strand of rope parted.

There! In mid-speech, he barrelled forward, snatching the radar from Tails' hand while shoving the fox to the side. Not being braced for it, Tails went flying, and for once not of his own volition. The tiger scooped up the dragon-ball, and dropped it in his jacket pocket, even as he snatched up Upa.

"Okay, no body move, the kid gets it!" He had the Amerind boy by the neck, and backed away towards his plane.

"You are a coward to hide behind my son." Bora growled, but didn't move forward.

"At least I'm a live coward! Now, I'm gonna get in my plane, and fly off, and as long as you don't follow me, I'll drop the kid off some miles away." He didn't add that he wasn't going to land the plane first.

While at least two of the people being threatened could move at ludicrous speed when they wanted to, neither of them could risk Upa's life on getting to Yellow and taking him down, as the slightest twitch could break Upa's neck.

"Wait... we'll have a chance when he's flying..." whispered Tails over the comm. He was still lying on the floor, unwilling to move in case he scared Yellow into doing something stupid. "He'll need his hands free, and that'll give us an opening..."

The plane took off, and circled once, Yellow giving a nasty sneer as he flew off.

Tails flipped to his feet. "Don't worry, Mr Bora, we'll get Upa back. We can follow him easily enough without being seen."

"Huh? How?" Goku exclaimed.

"You have the other radar, and he has the dragon-ball. We get ahead of him under cover of the trees, and fly up from below, that plane will have a blind spot on the underside. You're better at sensing ki, you detect where Upa is, punch straight up through the underside, and get him away. I'll distract Yellow."

"Okay! Kinto'un!" Goku bounded up on the flying cloud, pulling down his goggles, as Tails, re-set his goggles for Goku's radar, and wound up his tails as he put them on. The pair shot off, weaving through the trees, diving under branches and through gaps, hot on the trail of the target icon that showed on their overlay displays.

Since both were flying in earnest, Goku low on Kinto'un, and Tails in full pusher propeller mode, and the plane they were trailing was no

jet, it wasn't more than a minute before they were closing in on the Red Ribbon thug, Tails calling out the range over the comm.

"300 metres... 200 metres... 100 metres... Okay, coming up on him... allowing for ascent time and time to break through tree cover... NOW!"

Tails zoomed up, flipping over to tail-copter mode and hauling himself skywards, using his tails to clear a path through the branches and leaves. Goku followed on Kinto'un. They blasted up through the leafy canopy into the open air exactly where Tails had calculated, with the plane above and behind them, and the Colonel's view blocked by his own fuselage.

Goku shot straight up on Kinto'un, sensing that Upa was stuck in the gap behind the pilot's seat, and smashing through the undercarriage and fuselage to arrive behind the kid, who'd been knocked out. Goku picked him up and jumped out of the plane, to land on Kinto'un.

Tails, meanwhile had shot up in front of the plane, flying backwards at the same rate. He heard and saw Yellow swear, and reach behind him, only to find empty air. The tiger then triggered the quad mounted machine guns in the nose, but Tails hovered between the streams, zipping out of the way as the tiger threw the plane into a violent turn.

The structure of the aircraft was already weakened, and Yellow's violent manoeuvre finished the job. It's wings folded up and the thing plummeted out of the sky. Tails dived after it, and scooped Colonel Yellow out of his seat, or rather hauled the entire seat out of the fuselage, seconds before the rest of the craft crashed into the trees below and exploded in a cloud of vapourised fuel and burning ordnance.

Yellow was frantically holding onto the seat as Tails hovered, as he'd neglected to put on a seat belt. "Wha... what!"



"Now, could I have my radar and the ball back, please?" said the red fox, looking annoyed.

"Get me down!" yelled out the Colonel. To his surprise, Tails did so, lowering the seat gently to the ground. However, he said, "If you try to run, I can catch you. If you pull a weapon out, I am ready this time, and will dodge. Put them on the ground in front of you."

Seeing no other choice, Yellow pulled out the dragon-ball and radar, and put them on the ground. "So that's why you saved me?"

Tails shook his head slightly, even as he crouched to pick up the items. He kept looking at the tiger the whole time. He'd already proven he couldn't be trusted.

"No, the dragon-ball is supposed to be the next best thing to indestructible, and as for the radar, I built it from scratch, and I have my toolkit and spares with me, in case it got broken. I could build a replacement in a couple of hours. I may have to kill, to protect innocents, I may have to kill you if you become a threat, but I won't let people die, not even bad guys like you, if I can save them."

The tiger was surprised, after all he'd done the kid was still willing to save him... not that he had much of a future. "So what happens now?"

"I take you back, Bora takes you with the other prisoners to the edge of Karrin Sanctuary, and you get picked up by the police." Tails added seriously. "If you try and return to the Red Ribbon Army, they will kill you, no matter what you tell them. It's even in their orientation manual!"

Colonel Yellow sagged. The kid was right, at least this way he'd still be alive. He was just worried that Commander Red might send someone after him, maybe even the legendary assassin Taopaipai, who Commander Red had employed before to deal with inconvenient people.

"I... I reported in." He didn't know exactly why he'd spoken, maybe it was because if these kids were after the dragon-balls, they'd butt heads with the Red Ribbon again, and his own best chance of survival was for the Red Ribbon to keep failing. Yeah, that was it, it couldn't be gratitude, or guilt. "I gave descriptions of you both, and told them I was bringing in the ball and a hand-held radar. When I don't arrive..."

The small fox gave out a big sigh. "We're going to keep running into them, so I guess it doesn't make a difference. They already have one dragon-ball at their headquarters, and forces at each of the other sites, so we're probably going to have to take down the whole organisation."

"That's impossible! I don't care how powerful you are, you're just two kids. They have some scary people working for them, and a lot heavier weapons..."

"Impossible is just a word people use so they don't feel bad when they fail. I know people who do 'impossible' things on a regular basis. When I get back to my own world, there's a villain who's conquered the entire world to defeat, so I guess this'll be good practice. C'mon, let's go."

He let the ex-Colonel sit back in the seat and strap in this time, and carried him back. All the tiger could think about was lying low, doing his time, getting as far away from this whole business as possible. Maybe he could get a lighter sentence if he turned informant. Normally he'd be scared that the Red Ribbon would come after him, but he rather thought that with these two on the loose, they were going to be distracted.

By the time he got out, there might no longer be a Red Ribbon Army, at least he could hope. If there were still jobs in advertising going, he could start over. Who knew, maybe he could even start to like breakfast cereal.

**Author's Notes:** Why did writing this chapter feel like it was like pulling teeth out without anesthetic? I was blocked for a long time on a fundamental fact in the DB universe, that bad guys get killed. How would Tails react to that reality? I've tried to resolve it above, and hope I haven't done too badly.

The next part is more action, less discussion, and so should write easier, but I've got another chapter of Cerinia Chronicles to write first. But to give a hint to DB fans, the next chapter is 'Arctic Fox Tails'.

# Arctic Fox Tails Part 1

## Chapter 13 - Arctic Fox Tails Part 1

The next morning found Tails deep in thought, surrounded by pieces of junk from the wrecked vehicles and Goku deep in breakfast, surrounded by empty ration packs. Amongst the supplies that the Yellow division of the Red Ribbon Army had brought with them were several Capsule crates of MREs and Goku was beginning the day with a light snack of a dozen or so.

"C'mon, Tails there's plenty of this stuff!" called out Goku.

"It's okay, I already ate, I'm trying to figure where we go next." Tails was examining a world map view on the dragon-ball radar. Goku came over and looked over his shoulder.

The sai-jin shrugged. "I thought we'd just go to the next nearest. It's the one at the Red Ribbon Army's main base, isn't it? So we could beat them up at the same time."

"No!" Tails shook his head violently. "I don't doubt we could get through any number of ordinary troops, but I want to know more about any special weapons, or really powerful people they may have. Colonel Yellow was saying there was this one guy, General Blue, who could've been in the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai if he wanted to, and can freeze you in place with telekinesis."

He pointed to a spot on the map, in the sea near the Turtle House. "Actually, he's out after this dragon-ball, but there may be others. The dragon-ball at their base isn't going anywhere, and the troops they have at the base aren't doing any real harm. It's their field forces that are the problem. They have orders to kill anyone who knows about the dragon-balls, and while most of them are in uninhabited areas, there's this one up in the far north east, actually it's easier for us to go west across the ocean to get there.

"They have the inhabitants of an entire town, Jingle Town, searching for the dragon ball, and when they find it..." He shuddered. "There's also a base, the biggest they have outside their main one, called Muscle Tower. So we go there next. We save the people, and get a practice run for the main event. Hopefully they'll have records too, so we'll get more information."

"Okay then! Let's go! Kinto'un!"

The little cloud flew down, but Tails caught Goku's arm before he jumped on.

"Whoa! I need to set up some stuff before we do. First, remember the baddies have a dragon-ball radar too, even if it isn't portable. And they do have radio."

Tails sighed, Goku really was a lot like Sonic, ready to rush off and do it to it, and with Sonic Tails would have just followed along, trusting to his hero to know what to do. But with Goku, he felt responsible, even though Goku was more powerful than he was. After all Goku was collecting the dragon-balls on his behalf.

The Red Ribbon Army would have to be destroyed, he'd seen one world taken over by an evil dictator, and he wasn't going to allow it to happen here, but that only meant he'd have to be extra careful not to miss a trick, Which meant he had to act like Sally, and plan everything out. Not that he wasn't having fun doing it, it was like solving a difficult problem in engineering, but different. He held up a confiscated radio.

"They're scramble coded with a different scramble for each team or I'd be listening in right now. In short, they can see our dragon-ball, and will know which way we're going, and radio ahead so the bad guys know we're coming. Unless I take steps..."

"How will moving around help?"

"Uh uh, I mean build stuff. The dragon-ball radars detect an electromagnetic signal, so I'll build a Faraday cage, uh, a box that blocks it. There's plenty of junk from the wrecked vehicles. I just hope no-one else comes up with the same idea."

He paused in thought a moment. "Actually, I'll add a sub-program to the radar that monitors the presence of each dragon-ball. If one does disappear, it'll log the time and location, so we'll at least know where to start."

"So you're going to hide grandpa's ball?" Goku asked.

"We can cross the Red Ribbon up a bit first. We'll head towards their main base, like you said, then halfway there put the dragon-ball in the box and head off to Muscle Tower. They already think Colonel Yellow had the dragon-ball and was bringing it home. So they won't know if he was intercepted by someone else, or what's going on. And they won't be expecting us at Muscle Tower."

"Like doing a double split image to get 'em to look the wrong way?" Goku managed to put it in fighting terms.

"Yeah, same idea." Tails agreed. "While I'm at it, I'm also going to rig up a beacon for Bora to carry so the police can find him at the edge of Karrin Sanctuary. And I was thinking, it'd be useful if we could train ourselves to be bullet-proof like him. By my calculations we're both strong enough to throw handfuls of pebbles at bullet speeds."

He held up a widget with trailing wires. "Those jet fliers use a radar ground speed sensor, I'll just hook it up to a display and mount it on a pistol grip, and we can calibrate our throwing speed against real bullets, work our way up from light pistols to assault rifles."

"But that's going to take forever!" Goku looked over longingly at Karrin tower.

Tails shook his head again. "No, I can get it all done in under an hour. I have all the parts I need and a good tool-kit. You could always

go down to the stream and grab some big bags of gravel for us to train with, and I'm sure Bora would be happy to spar."

"Hey, now that's a plan!" Goku exclaimed, and headed off towards the river.

"Sir! I've got a lead on those names in the message!" The sergeant came into Major Motoki's office holding a video-tape high. "You wanted any information brought straight to you!"

The major had been examining the interrogation reports from the Red Ribbon Army group they'd brought in. Unfortunately, none of them knew the whereabouts of the main base, though he did have a lot better idea what the regular army was up against. It appeared that the pilots of the transports that carried them out to their operations were the only ones who knew, and they didn't stay with the field forces.

"Well come on man, let's see it!" As an intelligence officer, he had playback equipment in his office. The tape proved to show an improbable sequence of two children, a human and a two tailed fox, beating the biscuit bits out of one another in some kind of arena in front of a cheering crowd.

The major frowned. "What does some special effects video have to do with our mysterious benefactors? Impressive special effects I'll grant you, I can't even see the wires." He winced as the fox got smashed out of the sky and through the solid stonework of the arena floor, leaving a hole.

"You don't understand sir!" The sergeant said. "This is genuine footage from the recent Tenka-ichi Budo'kai, the world martial arts tournament. The spiky haired boy is called Son Goku, the two-tailed fox is one Miles Prower, a.k.a Tails. They're apparently students of the legendary Muten Roshi."

Major Motoki shook his head in disbelief as the fox pulled himself out of the hole in the ground he'd ended up in. "Who? You know I don't

follow martial arts. And there's no way anyone could pull off some of those moves without breaking themselves."

The sergeant looked stunned. "You've never heard of the legendary god of martial arts? Sorry sir, I train a bit myself, and every martial artist has heard of the Turtle Master, though it's pretty much legendary. But according to what I've been able to find out, he was there, and he had three students with him. There's even a rumour that he entered the tournament himself under the name Jackie Chun."

He looked a bit embarrassed. "I'm still trying to find corroborating evidence for what happened there, but I do have some leads. Unfortunately, Master Roshi didn't leave a forwarding address, but these two were seen in the company of Bulma Briefs."

"As in Dr Calvin Klein Briefs, owner of Capsule Corporation?" Major Motoki rubbed his forehead. "This is starting to sound less and less believable by the minute."

"It's one of the few things I've been able to confirm, sir. The way they acted indicated they all knew each other, and had done for some time. Shortly afterwards, apparently at Prower's request, Capsule Corps donated the services of a couple of flying tankers to deliver water to a drought stricken village in 31st Province. Prower and Son Goku supposedly travelled there too. On a flying cloud!"

"Now hold on a..." The major stopped. "Wait, Chief Maki of Peppertown said the aircraft that delivered the prisoners was shrouded in a cloud..."

He sighed. "Very well, I'll see if I can get an interview with Miss Briefs, that would be West city, and then go on to this village. It's not like we have much else to go on..."

He was interrupted by his phone. When he answered the screen showed Chief of Police Maki again. "Major Motoki, we've had a



follow up to the Red Ribbon Army thing. Uh, I've got a message here."

"Delivered by a flying cloud?"

"I... well, yes, but I didn't like to say before. I'm sure it must just be some cover..."

"Never mind that, what's the message?"

The chief looked down. "Uh... 'Dear police, a bigger bunch of these Red Ribbon bad guys were attacking people in the Karrin Highlands. A guy called Bora is sort of police here, and with him we stopped them. He's bringing all the ones we've captured, and a bunch of their weapons to the edge of the Wildlands.

"I've built a radio beacon, which he'll activate when he gets there, so you should be ready three days from now to go there and pick them up. You'll need space for at least forty bad guys, and we caught the leader, Colonel Yellow, who's willing to tell you everything he knows in short sentences.'" Chief Maki paused. "I think he means for a shorter sentence, sir."

"Uh... 'Be ready to home in on a broadcast signal at 96 megacycles from around 21st Province grid 961 by 304. We'll use that frequency again if we come across something we need to hand over to you. And don't worry about the rest of their vehicles and stuff, we'll drop that off at Capsule Corps so the capsules can be recycled.

"Hope this finds you well, Tails. P.S. Goku says Hi too, but he's busy collecting pebbles so we can practice becoming bullet proof.' That's all."

"Bullet proof?" the major asked with raised eyebrows.

After setting things up, and sending the message to the police that caused such consternation, the pair were off in little more than Tails' specified hour, running at first. They'd found that they could both

throw pebbles at up to handgun speeds, and Goku could manage to duplicate assault rifle fire. But flying on Kinto'un disrupted the trajectories as did the shield of ki Tails used to deflect wind resistance.

They'd started more slowly and worked their way up, and it had become something of a game, not only to hit the other, but to reach out and catch the pebbles after they rebounded, thus salvaging ammunition, and preventing them from having to stop to collect more. It required a level of speed and eye hand co-ordination beyond the old 'Stop the hornets from stinging you' technique Master Roshi had used. By the time they were half way to Red Ribbon HQ, Goku was occasionally catching pebbles in-bound.

They stopped for Tails to slip the dragon-ball into the shielded box, and he noted with approval that the disappearance of their dragon-ball was noted on the HUD of his goggles. He turned to Goku.

"We're not trying to catch bullets, not yet."

"Just having some fun. So now we head for Jingle town?"

"Yes, but first we're going to have to find a town and get you some warm clothes, like the ones Bulma got for me. From what I read, it's snowy pretty much all the time up there, and very cold."

"Snowy?"

"You've never seen snow? Or ice?" At Goku's puzzled look Tails realised Goku probably hadn't, after all his home had been sub-tropical, and he'd had never been really far north or south. He continued. "Well we've had it snow a couple of times in Knothole. Snow's frozen water, and so's ice, but ice is one solid lump, while snow is lots of little bits.

"It'll be like the ice box at Master Roshi's, you've had ice in cold drinks. It's going to be cold enough that even my regular fur won't be enough to keep me warm, and since you don't have fur, you might end up all frozen too, all cold and hard like ice."

Goku shivered. "Then we'd better get me these clothes. Being frozen sounds like no fun at all."

"Well, snow can be fun, if you're dressed up warm. You can squeeze it together to build things, and slide on it, have snowball fights and..." He stopped as he remembered doing some of those things with the Freedom Fighters, and felt himself tearing up. "Sorry, I was just remembering..."

Goku slapped him on the shoulder, something that would have broken most statues, but was only a tap to the toughened-up Tails. "Heh, we'll get the dragon-balls and get you home. And beat up on these Red Ribbon goons too. But I want to know more about these snow-ball fights. Are they anything like the fights we have getting the dragon-balls?"

Tails chuckled, "Not exactly..."

They raced off, Tails explaining as they went.

(Background music time suitable for travelling. 'Dragon Ball Z op 1 (instrumental)')

- [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=1lla2rVYhUM](https://youtube(dot)com/watch?v=1lla2rVYhUM))

A number of hours later, they flew across the western coastline of the continent, Goku on Kinto'un, and Tails in Deuce Juice flight mode. His twin tail ram-jet technique had held up all the way across the ocean, a new personal best, and he still had some energy left. Goku had also been able to train some more on bullet proofing, as they had finally been able to get Kinto'un to let the thrown pebbles through without deflection.

All in all, it was a satisfied pair of martial artists who landed by an ice cold mountain stream. As Kinto-un slowed down, and stopped shielding Goku from external conditions, the young sai-jin shuddered. "Oh boy, I see what you mean Tails. I guess I'd better get that stuff on now."

Tails popped open one of the Capsule crates they'd liberated, revealing the winter clothes. "I can take a bit more, I guess, but I'll join you. I'll get a fire going and we can have some lunch. If we're going to kick over Muscle Tower, we want to be running on full power cells."

"Yeah!" Goku was always up for two things, fighting and food.

Over a bunch more MREs and some hot drinks, Tails had some mint tea, while Goku had hot chocolate, the little fox explained a little further. "I figure rather than just jumping in, we look for an outlying house, stop there and see what we can find out about the bad guys before we attack the tower. And I think we should do the last bit on foot, they may have regular radar, so they can see flying things coming."

"Okay, you're the one who's been calling the shots so far." Goku shrugged.

"That is okay with you, isn't it?" Tails asked. "I mean you are older than me, and more experienced. A lot of people would think that made them better able to figure out what to do."

"Meh!" Goku dismissed it off-handedly. "You're better at it than I am, and smarter. I can figure out things in a fight pretty well, but I don't think about the rest of it. Doesn't bother me."

Tails felt relieved, he didn't want to argue with his friend. Goku was smart, he just used it in different ways. He took a sip of tea. "Oh, this is good! I love the taste of mint, back on Mobius I could only get it rarely, when I could find some wild in the Great Forest. I managed to put together a small herb garden, but we were so strapped for growing space... To be able to just walk into a store and buy some, and sugar too, you guys are so lucky."

"You're sure you don't want some of this chocolate? You make it really good!" Goku asked.

"Makes me feel ill, I did some research on Bulma's computer, and it turns out a lot of us furry types can't handle it, not in any more than small quantities. Best not to get a taste for it."

They finished up, and set off again, staying low to the ground, and scouting for an outlying home. But they found something else.

"Please, don't hurt me!" Apparently it took two rifle armed soldiers to subdue a six year old girl. She was bundled up in a winter coat and furry hat, while they, a wolf and a human, were in full greatcoats and helmets. One of them was holding her at rifle point while the other snatched away the covered basket she was carrying.

"Trying to sneak something past us? Maybe the dragon-ball?" sneered the wolf, the one who snatched the basket. "Being out in a restricted zone is punishable by death!"

"I didn't realise! But they're just cloud-berries, I spent all day picking them! Mom was going to bake them in a pie!"

"Well now you've given them to the Red Ribbon Army." The wolf said, getting a handful. "Hey, these are good! For that, we'll let you live!"

"Hey, you two bozos! Give the girl back her berries and surrender, or we'll beat you like a drum!" They turned to see Tails and Goku standing there, clad in cold weather gear, and both looking furious.

"More brats!" the human smirked. "Yeah, we're so scared. Looks like we'll get to kill someone today after all."

"No. You won't." Tails said flatly, and blurred. The little girl didn't even see what happened, but the soldier crumpled to the floor, revealing Tails standing there, fist outstretched, and a grim look on his face.

"Why you little..." The wolf started to stomp down on Tails, but the little fox just reached for and grabbed the foot, holding it immobile

"Hey Tails! Save some for me!" cried out Goku, and dashed over to the wolf. He sprang past the lupine's face, scooped the basket of cloud berries away and put it back in the girls hands.

He then moved in front of her, taking a stance as Tails released the wolf and stepped away. The Red Ribbon soldier, having barely regained his balance, swung his rifle off his back and tried to smash the butt into Goku's head. Goku just reached up and grabbed it, stopping it dead, then squeezed. The wood splintered and cracked, and the firing mechanism pinged and crunched as it was twisted into uselessness.

"What a wimp!" The sai-jin let go of the useless rifle and did a standing jump to kick the wolf in the head. The wolf's head snapped back, and he collapsed.

Tails was already moving to check on the girl, but stopped when she started to back away. "Hey, it's okay, we're not here to hurt you. I'm Tails, and this is Goku."

"You were scary..." the girl mumbled, but stopped moving away.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you, I just got so mad at those goons..." Tails held his hands out at his sides, and kept his distance, trying to look as non-threatening as possible.

"Yeah, we're the good guys, and that means we're only scary to bad people. Like these two." Goku shook his head. "They didn't have much."

"But... they're dead. And when the Red Ribbon find out, they'll do terrible things to the mayor, and who knows who else?" the girl exclaimed.

Tails knelt by the human, and felt under the scarf at his neck. "No, still alive. I don't like killing, even bad guys like this." He checked the other. "Yep, still breathing, though he's going to have a serious headache when he wakes up."

He started checking over the two. "We'll tie 'em up and get Kinto'un to carry them back to where we had lunch. By the time they get back, we'll have dealt with the rest of them. But first I've got to make sure they don't have any vehicle capsules or radios."

He found a radio and two capsule storage cases, each about the size of a cigarette case, and mostly empty. A few turns of rope from his capsule chest, and Kinto'un was doing another cargo mission. The girl was momentarily stunned by the appearance of the flying cloud, but recovered admirably.

"How can the two of you deal with them? They have a big tower filled with guns and soldiers and who knows what else!"

"That's why we're here." Tails replied.

"That and the dragon-ball." Goku added.

"You're after it too?" The girl looked scared again.

Tails quickly added. "Yes, but we're not going to hurt anyone, well except for the Red Ribbon. What I mean is, some other Red Ribbon goons told us about the fact that they were using the villagers to look for it, so freeing them and taking down this group is most important. You say your mayor is being held by them?"

"Yes... But they're all grown-ups! Kids can't fight grown-ups!"

Tails smiled. "It's okay, we won't bother you any more. We'll rescue the mayor first so he isn't at risk. Um... could you show us his house so we can take him there?"

The girl seemed to be thinking, and made a decision. "You can come to my house. You can see their tower from there. But you've got to promise not to do anything to bring soldiers there."

The girl's name was Suno, and her mother was surprised when she turned up at the door with the two Turtle school fighters, and even

more surprised when she heard what had happened. It was clear she didn't really believe it though. She still made sure they both had hot soup and a place by the fire, their cold weather gear hung up with Suno's.

Tails summarised what he'd gathered from her. "So the men of the village are all out searching under guard, they've taken all the radios, and cut-off communications, except for the few calls they force the mayor to make to defuse suspicion. And you think he's on the top level."

"I think so dear, but you really shouldn't be worrying about such things." Suno's mother said. "You can stay here tonight, and hopefully you can get away in the morning."

"Okay! But we'll go beat 'em up for you first!" Goku exclaimed, standing.

"Whoa! I think it's better if we split up." Tails said. "I'll fly in from above, break into the top level and carry the mayor here, while you knock down the front door and work your way up. That way they'll be looking the wrong way when I go in."

He drained his drink and moved over to the window, pulling a pair of electro-binoculars from his pocket. He stood there, zooming in. The tower was a lot like a rook in chess, the base a broad circular one story structure with a crenelated rim that formed a parapet around the main circular tower. At the top was another wider one story structure with a crenelated roof. But this tower had curved slot windows, guns and a radio dish on top.

"Wow, they've got at least half a dozen gun turrets on this side alone! You're going to have to dodge the fire from those. And I'll need something to wrap the mayor in.

He thought for a moment. "Could we wait here till twilight? That way your dad and the others will be back, and the Red Ribbon goons will



all be in one place. It'll also make it easier for me to fly in without being spotted."

Goku grinned. "More bad guys to beat. That's why you do the planning."

Tails thought of something. "Actually, I'd better make sure they don't have radar. I didn't see any antennae, but I might have missed something." He pulled out the Red Ribbon Army radio, and his capsule case and popped a tool box.

Suno's eyes widened. "Wow! You have a lot of capsules. You must be rich."

"They're mostly just storage." He didn't add that many of them were Red Ribbon Army supply crates. "And the tool-kit was a gift. Could I borrow some table space?"

In seconds he had the back off the radio and a number of micro-tools scattered across the work surface. The case of the radio came off and he started exploring the interior with fine screwdrivers, pliers and a soldering tool. He put on a stereo-loupe magnifier which was designed to fit over fox ears.

"Let's see a short local air radar system should be in the 1 to 10 Gigacycle range... this radio doesn't go near that... But, yes, the scramble system is hardware based and has a 12 gig oscillator so if I take it out of the receive circuit, and feed the signal... uh huh..." The smell of solder rose from the circuits. "Companding with the primary carrier wave generator and re-working the auto-tuning circuitry..."

With sure movements he worked over the interior of the radio, adding a very few hair thin wires, and a couple of small components from the recesses of his tool box. Of course, to someone who wasn't an electronics engineer, the activity would look meaningless.

"That should do it!" He took off the eye-wear and brushed his bangs back into place before closing up the case. He turned it round and

switched it on, and nothing happened, except the three digit LED display on the side that normally showed the channel number lit up with '0.0'.

"Very nice dear." Suno's mother had expected it to do nothing. After all he had to be playing, didn't he? Even if he had all those tools, he'd been given them by someone. Still, at least he was enjoying himself.

"First to test it..." He pressed a button and the display changed to '0.62'. "That's the frequency of the transmitter. Don't worry it's feeding direct into the receiver circuitry, not broadcasting. Okay, now let the auto-tuner search for the strongest signal..."

He waited a few seconds, then a few more, and still the display stayed at zero.

"Was something supposed to happen?" asked Suno, looking puzzled.

"Only if they had radar. At this range your window wouldn't weaken it. Since I'm not getting anything, I'll be safe as long as I fly up out of visual range."

"How would you fly?" asked Suno. "Even if you have a Capsule helicopter or something, you wouldn't be allowed to fly it."

"I don't need one, I can fly using my tails." Tails started to sweep his twin tails around, then looked around the cosy home. "But I'd better not in here, I might knock something over."

"Of course dear." Suno's mother said. "In the mean time, I'm making cloud berry pie, would you like some?"

Several hours, and a helping of cloud berry pie later, Suno and her mother had decided that their two guests told wonderful stories, but were certifiably insane. They saw movement at the tower, and Tail's

electro-binoculars showed the village men being assembled under guard, and being told off to go home.

"Excellent! Let's give them fifteen minutes to get inside, and then it's go time!"

Goku started limbering up. "Finally! You guys have been nice, and the pie was delicious, but it's time to get the rest of 'em!"

"You were serious?" Suno's mother exclaimed. "Now really, I know you mean well, I can't let you go get yourselves hurt!" She went to stand in front of the door.

Tails was already putting on his cold weather gear, making sure his tails were free to move. "We have to. Don't worry, you'll be safe."

It was at this point Suno's father opened the door, forcing Suno's mother to move. Tails gave Goku a nod, and the two blurred past him, coming to a stop outside. The sky had purpled into twilight, white streaks of cloud reflecting the last rays of the set sun, and Muscle Tower was a dark silhouette, looming ominously against the distant, snow covered mountains.

"Wait! No don't go! You'll leave a track in the snow!" Suno's mother came rushing out.

Tails turned. "I thought of that. I'll carry Goku some way off so his footprints don't lead back here! Ready Goku?"

"You know it!" Goku cracked his knuckles. Tails wound up his tails, and took off, hovering in tail-copter mode. He drifted down, holding out his arms and Goku reached up and grabbed them. "Let's go!"

Suno and her father had joined her mother outside, and all three were watching open mouthed and eyes bugging out as Tails took off. Goku called back. "Keep that cloud berry pie warm, the mayor will probably want some!"

# Arctic Fox Tails Part 2

## Chapter 14 - Arctic Fox Tails Part 2

"Miss Briefs?" It hadn't been easy, but Major Motoki had managed to get a chance to see the inventor's daughter. He had been waiting in the reception area of the family's home in West city, waiting for her to come home. The teenager who'd just come in matched her database picture.

"Yes?" The wrench wench of Capsule Corps looked over at the tall, spare human in military uniform. "Are you sure you don't want my father? Or one of the guys who deals with our military contracts?"

"No, I'm Major Motoki, 12th Province Military Intelligence." He showed his credentials. "I came to ask you some questions about these two individuals."

He opened up a briefcase that had sat beside him, and held out images of Goku and Tails, taken from blown up stills of the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai video.

"That's Goku and Tails!" Bulma's expression of surprise turned into a frown of worry. "They aren't in trouble or anything?"

"It depends on what you classify as trouble. We have reason to believe that they've been fighting the Red Ribbon Army."

"WHAT! The world's most evil crime organisation? How would they... no, I can guess. They found some Red Ribbon Army guys hurting someone and jumped in. Goku would do it just for the fighting practice, but Tails should have... no, Tails has an even bigger case of 'saving people syndrome' than Goku." She hesitated in her headlong analysis. "They weren't hurt were they?"

"Not as far as we know, though I can't say the same for the Red Ribbon soldiers."

The major felt relief, it sounded like this girl had plenty to tell him. He was right. Some hours later, after a recap of the first two dragon-ball manga, and selected sections of Sonic Sat Am (though neither of them thought of it that way) the somewhat stunned major tried to summarise what he'd learned.

"So Goku is this super strong, ultra tough kid from Mount Paozu, with a magic staff and a flying cloud, and Miles Prower is actually a genius extra-terrestrial two tailed fox who can fly, from a world with advanced technology which has been taken over by an evil dictator? And they're currently questing to find these magic balls that give you a wish so he can go home."

"I wouldn't say extra-terrestrial, he's from an alternate version of Earth, but they call it Mobius. But yes, more or less." Robots had served supper, and Bulma had eaten with him.

"You realise how crazy that sounds?" He didn't add that the interrogations had turned up that the Red Ribbon Army was hunting dragon balls too.

"Capsule Corps wouldn't be sinking several billion zeni into developing the tech Tails shared with us if it wasn't the real deal. We're launching a factory module in to orbit next week to fabricate materials in zero gravity, based on Tails' work. And as for Goku... well you said you've seen the footage from the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai. I was there, and it all happened."

"Hmm... You wouldn't happen to have any idea where they might go next?"

"Sorry, I..." She thought for a second. "Maybe I can. You promise they're not in any trouble? They're only trying to help. And Tails has first call on that wish, he's needed back on his own world."

"Miss Briefs, if I meet them I will personally shake them by the hand for what they've done so far, and do what I can to see they get a civilian commendation. Besides, if I start putting things about magic

wishing balls in my report, I'll end up telling it to a doctor in a military psych ward.

"I just want to find out if they know anything about the main base of the Red Ribbon, and whatever else they've been able to find out. If we know where they are, the army can finally move in and take care of those terrorists once and for all. As long as they can pick and choose where they strike, we can't stop them."

"Okay then. Wait here." Bulma went off up to her room and returned with an 10 inch CRT portable TV. "My first proof of concept dragon ball radar. It can't zoom in, but it shows the locations of the dragon balls on a global map projection."

She plugged it in, and fiddled about with the controls. "Okay... almost... got it!"

The screen showed an outline of the world map, centred on the one main continent, and with grid lines crossing it. There were six points of light in various spots.

"I thought you said there were seven." asked the major after a moment's observation. He noted the positions of the remaining ones, where there were these magic balls there might be other field forces from the Red Ribbon Army.

"There should be, unless some-thing's blocking the signal from one, hmm, a shielded box would do it, or a sufficient thickness of biological matter considering the frequency band..."

As they watched, another light, one in the far north east of the map winked out. A few seconds later, there was a beeping sound from the major's brief case. He went over and pulled out a bulky radio-telephone.

"Motoki here."

"Sir, this is Sergeant Wabi back at HQ. We've just had an a call from a place called Jingle Village."

"Would that be in..." He looked back at the screen and made a mental calculation. "... 5th Province?"

"Yes sir! How did you know?"

"Lucky guess. Well come on man, what did they say?"

Tails stuck to tree line height as he moved away from Suno's house, relying on the occasional conifers and the crags in the mountain line to break up his outline. Fortunately there hadn't been any foxes or cats in the line up of Red Ribbon goons when they'd returned to base, so he'd have the advantage of natural low light vision, and the technological boost of his electro-binoculars night vision mode.

He landed about ninety degrees around from the house, and dropped down beside Goku. "Make sure you have your goggles on so we can talk."

"Okay, storm in there, take out the exterior guards and then I suggest going in via the second level parapet. Avoid fire from the big guns, they could really hurt you. Try to block off the ground entrance so no-one can come out and take hostages from among the villagers. Then work your way up, I guess. And make lots of noise and wreck stuff."

"Now that I can do!" He dashed off towards the tower. "Hyaaaah!"

Tails wound up his Tails and took off ascending far above the level of the top of the tower before moving around to the side opposite the main entrance, and flying inwards. He used his binoculars to examine the top part of the tower. There, a lit window and an old man sat reading...

Down below, as he hoped, the poor light and apathy had done the work of a cloaking device. By the time the nearest guards were even aware of the ballistic Goku heading their way, he was under the

minimum elevation of almost all of the fixed guns. A few guards, more alert than the others, managed to bring up their guns and fire, but Goku just bounded back and forth, evading them.

One heavy machine gun managed to get into action, but Goku's staff was in his hand, and he spun it in front of him to create a shield that the bullets just rebounded off of. Then he was among the guards. He ran down a bear without stopping, then rebounded off the wall to plough into another thug, who went flying, and caroomed off a third, who joined his caroom-mate in unconsciousness.

Tails saw that Goku was having fun, and flew over the top of the tower, noting that although there were guns mounted around the periphery, none of them were manned. He dropped down and paused a moment by the radio dish, ripping off an access panel and making sure a number of important and hard to replace components made their way to his pockets.

The sounds of fighting and firing had died down, but were replaced by a P.A system. Tails would have loved to stay and mess about with the gear some more, it looked more complicated than a basic video-phone up-link, but rescuing the mayor took first priority, and he didn't know how long Goku could keep them distracted.

"Can you hear me child?" For a second Tails looked round, afraid he'd missed seeing a security camera, but the voice continued. "Yes, you down there! Welcome to the Legendary Muscle Tower, Nyahaha!" Maniacal villain laugh, this then would be the eponymous General White, and he was talking to Goku.

Tails dropped over the side, hovering in front of the window he'd seen earlier, and the old man was still there, just now putting down his book. At close range he was thin and be-spectacled, with a bald pate that reared up through a shock of white hair. He was wearing a striped shirt and suspenders on his trousers. The mayor, from Suno's mother's description.



The loudspeaker voice continued. "What brings you to our stronghold!"

"I'm here to beat you all up and rescue the mayor." Goku's voice drifted up.

Tails grabbed the underside of the top parapet with both hands, finding or making dents in the stonework. He brought his legs up and his tails forward, and spun them against the window with some slight tweaks made to the effective blade profile.

The tips etched away a neat circle just over a metre across, and the direction of spin drew the glass outward. Tails let go, and dropped to catch the circular sheet of glass, flying up to carry it over the top parapet and lay it down.

"Oh well then!" came the amplified voice. "Just step through the door in front of you and walk up the stairs. His honour the mayor is on the top floor."

"Not for much longer." muttered the little fox as he dived back over the edge. He was ready to evade if General White or a guard had come into the room despite Goku's distraction, but the only man in the was the one he'd seen.

"Wh... what? Who are you?" The man was starting to shiver, which was unsurprising, Tails was starting to feel the cold even through his winter wear.

"If you're the mayor of Jingle Town, I'm here to rescue you. I'm Tails, and my friend providing the distraction is Son Goku. We're going to stop the Red Ribbon Army, but first we've got to get you to safety so they can't use you as a hostage."

"Incredible! But how do we get out? The door is sealed from the other side."

"Same way I got in, we fly. But first you'd better get your coat on, and wrap up in as many blankets from that bed as you can." Just to make sure they weren't interrupted, Tails moved over to the door, more a moving wall panel, and went to work on an access panel again. As he thought, it was powered, and few disconnected wires and the thing wouldn't open for anything less than a cutting torch.

As the man bundled up, Tails went back to the window and took off a glove. Focussing ki energy into the claw tipped digits he normally covered, he swept them in wide arcs around the original hole, cutting out two crescent shaped extensions almost silently. He could have done this originally, but his newly invented tail glass cutter technique was faster. Laying them inside the room, he pulled down his goggles and went over to the mayor.

"I'm going to have to carry you out. Sorry about this!" He swept his tails under the man's legs, tipping him over into Tails' arms. Carrying him bridal fashion, Tails spun up his tails and flew out of the window. The mayor was holding onto him for dear life, but it didn't phase the little fox, who by now was used to much stronger grapples. He just spoke. "Comm, Goku."

The microphone in the goggles picked up his command, and popped up a connection icon on his goggles' HUD. Tails could hear the noise of fighting in the background. "Hi Goku! I've got the mayor, and I'm dropping him off at Suno's house. Don't tell the bad guys, they don't know yet. Then I'll come back and help."

"It's okay, these guys are wimps. Yah! I'm doing my best not to hurt them too much, but, Hyah! They're getting in each others way. I dropped a big... Take that! Cupboard or something across the door, so they're stuck in here, just like you said."

"That's great! But they may have tougher guys up stairs, that General White sounded confident. Anyway I'll home in on your signal... I'll see you soon. Comm off." He could see the warm lights of the Suno homestead below. A heated film on the surface of the

goggles prevented them from steaming up. Dropping down, he lowered the mayor to the snow beside it.

"Are you okay?" The young fox asked as he steadied the old man. The exercise of flying, even carrying the old man, hadn't strained him, but it had been enough to keep him warm.

"Fine m'boy. Better than I have been in months, though somewhat cold." The old man straightened up, breath puffing in clouds of vapour.

Tails went over to the door and knocked. There was a scrambling behind the door, until he moved over to the window, pulling the mayor gently with him, and waved. "Hi, I'm back! And I've brought the mayor."

The door opened and an incredulous lady, Suno's mother, peered out. "Mr Mayor?"

"Mrs Toshiro. Sorry to call on you so late. May we come in?"

"Of course, but how... you actually did it?" the last was directed at Tails.

"Flew in, cut off their communications, got the mayor out. Exactly as promised." Tails grinned and made a V sign. "Now all I've got to do is help Goku finish off the bad guys, then we can get you a radio and you can call in the police to take them off your hands. Well, I've got to go. Save us some of that pie, back soon!"

He flew off into the night sky, where brilliant stars and a crescent moon cresting the mountains in the south now provided some light.

As he flew back towards Muscle Tower, he used the voice command on his goggles' comm system again.

"Comm Goku. On my way back. I'll home in on you."

"It's okay, this Full Metal Jacket guy has a hard head, but I can take him." There were the sounds of property damage in the background.

Tails triggered the locator function on his goggles, and it showed an arrow pointing to the third floor, and moving around. Seconds later, there was an explosion, and a hole was blasted through the side of the tower. Thankfully, Goku's location was no-where near it.

Use the hole, or make his own? He decided on the first, cranking up to maximum pusher propeller speed as he dived in at an angle. If whatever made the hole was still looking that way, he'd be in their field of view for too short a time for it to matter.

He dived through and braked, just in time to see Goku throw a Kamehameha at a hugely built crew cut human in a combat jacket. It took the Red Ribbon soldier's head off, literally, leaving a metal stump.

"Uh... I blew his face off, I did a bad thing. um... sorry!"

Tails yelled out. "It's a robot! Don't let your guard down, it could still be working!"

"But he..." One of the fists blasted off the end of the arm and flew straight at Goku. "Whoa!"

He bounded back out of the way, as Tails called out, "I'll finish this! It's what I've been training for!"

He bounded off, and threw himself into a Tail-spin attack, focussing his ki into a cutting edge. He struck the robot from behind, and buzz-sawed up it's length, splitting the android in two. He came out of his spin and bounded off the ceiling to land beside Goku as the robot fell apart.

"What was that power... What \_are\_ you!" came a voice over the speaker.

"Coming to get the mayor, and beat you next!" called out Tails. He glanced down at the robot, and saw a couple of components that might be useful, so he picked them up. He noticed Goku was in his regular training clothes.

"What happened to your winter wear?"

The sai-jin looked around. "I was kinda warm once I got inside, so I took it off."

"Well go get it, you'll need it on the way back." Tails realised he was feeling pretty warm too, even with the hole in the wall. He started to slip out of his own gear. "I'll guard here while you get it."

"Scared?" The voice had recovered some of it's confidence. "Full Metal Jacket may have been tough, but that's nothing to Sergeant Major Purple, who's guarding the fourth floor!... Well what are you standing around for! Get down there and defend it!"

The last part had clearly been to someone by him, presumably this Purple guy. Tails just popped his capsule chest and put his folded gear in there. He started limbering up, as Goku came up. "Just dump it in the chest. Do you want a snack before we go get this guy?"

"I'm always up for a snack!" Tails handed Goku a half dozen MREs and had one himself, flying did use up energy.

"Hey! Aren't you brats taking this seriously? You're going to your deaths!" The voice was irate.

"All the more reason to top up our energy levels. I'd hate to die on an empty stomach." Tails replied to the voice. "Besides Goku's kicked your Red Ribboned butts all the way so far. As my friend Sonic says, 'Your lips are loosing, but your legs aren't juicing.' Good to go, Goku?"

"Yeah! Man that hit the spot!"

Side by side, they dashed up the stairs to the next level, and popped out... outdoors? Tails immediately moved away from the top of the stair well, and waved at Goku to go the other way. Then he looked around. The entire fourth level, a three story high room, was laid out as a forest with a small lake, and a clearing with a wooden house in a style Tails recognised. Well, a lot of other things here were similar to ancient pre-Mobian records, but who'd expect a Japanese style hut in the middle of a building?

One thing there was no sign of was the Purple goon who was supposed to be guarding this level... He jumped away, flipping in mid-air to land on a tree branch as some metal darts thudded into the ground where he stood. Goku dodged some a few seconds later, and Tails calculated the trajectories of the two attacks.

"Wa ha ha ha ha! Congratulations on reaching the fourth floor, children! Pity your progress must end now."

This bozo certainly loved the sound of his own voice. Well, he was the only one. Tails dropped to the ground, and picked up a rock, ears twitching as they triangulated on the sound, confirming the earlier source of the projectiles. A million years of evolution, and a couple of months training with Namu, allowed him to get the very best out of his senses. He might not be in the same class when it came to sensing ki signatures, but his natural abilities gave him a head start in the conventional senses.

"Not only has no-one ever defeated me, no-one has ever seen... Yowp! Waaaaah!"

A tall human, dressed in a shinobi costume, fell out of the tree Tails had aimed at.

Tails just folded his arms and started at him. "Who needs to see you when your lips are flapping all the time!"

Goku dropped his rock. "Aww! I was about to do it!"

"Ah... heh! So a bit of beginners luck." The ninja said, rubbing his face.

As he spoke, Tails thought quickly. This guy liked to boast almost as much as titanium-tokus. Which meant he should be susceptible to Sonic's tactics.

"Uh uh, not luck, it was easy to figure out the source of the projectiles from the trajectory. Your voice only confirmed your location. Of course, with a face like that, I wish you'd stayed hidden."

"Why you little brat! I'll show you that no-one can find me, until it's too late..." He hurled down a small object, and a cloud of smoke enveloped him. When it cleared, he was gone.

Goku spoke. "Hey Tails? Can I take this guy? You finished the metal guy, so it's my turn."

Tails felt guilty, he had kind of finished off Goku's opponent, and Goku had been very good about letting him call the shots. "Okay, it's not like you'll need help with him. Besides, I don't think he's fully awake yet, he's still in his pyjamas."

"Hey, these are the clothes of a ninja warrior! I mean, now child, see if you can pierce my cloak of invisibility!"

Goku wandered over to the guy, who was standing against a tree trunk, holding up a brightly coloured flag that was as big as he was. "Nah nah! I see you!"

"Huh, how?" Purple lowered his flag and looked at the pattern. "Gah! I had the wrong side showing! This is how it's supposed to work!"

He flipped it round and held it up to show a tree bark pattern.

"Uh, I can still see you." Goku said. Tails added, "Your feet are showing at the bottom, and the tips of your hands where you hold it up. I can see it from over here! Now if you had loops in the back you

could fit your hands into, and it was longer, it might actually work. Of course to make it really good, you should have a camera behind you, and make the sheet out of photo-chromic polymer fibres, so it can match it's surface to whatever the camera's seeing..."

"Enough!" yelled the ninja. "So you have good eyes. Well here the child play stops! This ninja concealment technique never fails! Turn your backs and count to thirty."

Goku turned round, but Tails just sniffed. "Uh, now who's not taking who seriously? You're supposed to be trying to kill us, and we're to turn our backs and leave you alone for thirty seconds? Not that I think you could sneak up on us, but I'm not sure either of us could dodge a ranged attack like that."

Seeing Goku's look, he sighed. "Okay, Goku can do it, I'll watch, but I won't tell him where you hide."

"Who are you to set terms!" growled Sergeant Major Purple..

"I'm Miles 'Tails' Prower, and I keep my word." Tails said, standing there arms folded.

"You... I... fine!" the fuming ninja replied. Goku turned and counted to thirty, with a bit of help from tails when he reached 18. He turned and looked around. "Hey that's neat, I really can't see him anywhere!"

"Remember what Namu taught us." Tails replied.

"Oh yeah..." Goku stretched out his other senses, eyes closed, and focussed on the ki flows around him, the living trees and animals... there, a larger ki source. He walked over to it to find only a large boulder. He kicked at it, and sent it flying away to reveal it was thin shell with the ninja hiding underneath.

"Hey, you weren't supposed to help him!"



"That's not what I said, I said I wouldn't tell him where you were, and I didn't. Goku would have figured it out anyway, but we want to get on."

The ninja decided not to try another concealment technique, instead he would show this impudent little fox up.

"My skills are more than just stealth, I am lightning quick. Can you match a ninja's speed, you two tailed twerp?"

Tails walked over beside him. "Goku, he's challenged me on this one. You still get to fight him though. Watch my back, see that he doesn't pull any sneaky stuff, okay?"

"Okay1" Goku leaned against a tree, and folded his arms.

"Cocky little brat, aren't you! Well laugh this off!" Purple took to his heels without warning circling the perimeter at a speed an Olympian would be proud of. Tails set himself and dashed after him, not even needing to boost with his tails to match it and more. After intensive training, his natural speed was up above a sprinting cheetah.

Purple looked over his shoulder as he ran, only to see the fox catching up with him. "No... No-one's that fast!"

He threw down some objects behind him. "See how you like my caltrops!"

Tails spotted the objects, and bounded over them with a tail assisted boost, not even slowing.

"Ohh! I hate you!" growled the ninja as Tails shot past him too fast for the ninja to even react. The little two tailed fox came to a stop ahead of him, where Goku was still standing. The silly shinobi staggered to a halt there, gasping for breath, while Tails wasn't even breathing hard, and stood there one hand held out in a victory sign. "I win!"

The voice from the speakers roared out. General White had had enough. "No more playing around, Purple. Finish them both, now!"

"Aye aye, General White, I will make it so!" The ninja drew a katana blade from the sheath on his back and held it horizontal before him. He focussed on Goku. "This fight is for real. Prepare to die!"

He jumped into action, not at Goku, but sidelong at Tails. The kit had been watching for treachery though, and pulled himself back and up out of the way with his tail-copter technique. "Uh uh! I promised Goku he could fight you. I'm staying up here until he finishes with you!"

The ninja took a blow across the back that staggered him, and turned to find Goku, staff extended. "Hey! You're supposed to fight me! That was a dirty trick!"

"And what was attacking me from behind?"

Goku looked genuinely puzzled. "Huh? that wasn't an attack, I just tapped you to get your attention."

The ninja decided to stay away from melee for the moment. But no need to let the brat know. "Let's see how you fight bare handed!"

He bounded back and threw a crescent shaped throwing blade at high speed. "Hah!"

Goku just dodged to the side. "Hey, that wasn't a bare handed attack. You're a liar!"

"Fool, in a battle of life and death, there are no rules!" The ninja sneered as he watched the boomerang blade curve round to come at Goku's back.

"Oh yeah, when you put it that way..." The kid was just standing there, easy meat... Ting! An orange blur swept past, and the blade spun off to plop in the water. "Huh?"

"It was a boomerang, coming back at you!" called out Tails. "Go on, he's running away!"

The ninja was already half way across the pond, skating on what looked like large plate-like floats. "Care to join me? The water's full of hungry piranha!"

Goku just took a few steps back, ran up and jumped across, landing on the other side ahead of him.

"What are you, a frog?" The ninja said, bug-eyed, which was appropriate. He lost his balance and fell in the water, jumping out onto the bank seconds later with a Yeeoowch! and several piranha attached to his tenders. He managed to pull them off with a number of winces and pained noises.

"So we gonna fight or do you give up?" Goku had his staff out, and was in a fighting stance.

"Do you think a legendary ninja would admit defeat?" Sergeant Major Purple, putting his fingers to his lips and whistling.

"What's going on?" Goku asked.

"Let me show you my ultimate ninja trick... The legendary ninja split!"

He bounded back against the tree-line, and appeared to split into 5 exact copies, which raced to circle Goku.

"Whoa! Now that's cool!" Goku exclaimed.

"Well boy, which one of us is real... which one, ha ha ha!" they chorused.

Tails was looking down on them, trying to detect the flicker of a spilt image illusion. "I can't tell, it's like they're all real!"

Goku dodged throwing knives from one, and bounded in to attack, only to barely escape the sword of another, and when he turned to fight that one, a third pulled a gun. Tails dipped down, picked up a stone and flicked it into the line of the shot, which ricocheted.

"Whoa! You're right Tails, it's like they're all real!" Goku called going back to a defensive stance in the middle.

"Fools, that's because we are all real!" the five came together in a sentai pose. "We're the legendary ninja quintuplets! You struggled with one, against five, you will die!"

Tails nearly fell out of the sky. "This is getting silly! Let's get this done!"

"I was not struggling!" Goku exclaimed. "But I guess Tails can help now."

Tails dived down to land back to back with Goku.

"Now we slash you both into sashimi!" the circling ninjas yelled.

"Just try it!" Goku said, bringing up his nyoibo. Tails added, "You're outnumbered two to five!"

The five ninjas dived in, swords striking, only to have the two figures flicker out. They turned outwards, only for two of them to go down, one from a strike from Goku's staff, the other from a well placed kick to the jaw as Tails jumped in over the sword. Bounding over the falling ninjas, they dropped on two others, slamming their heads down and forward, and riding them into the ground.

The last, possibly the original was already running away up the stairs. "I knew it, they both could do the real split-image illusion!"

"If you knew... why didn't you tell us?" mumbled one of the others through a face full of dirt.

"Time for my secret weapon!" The nutty ninja yelled and beat feet towards the stairs to the next level.

# Arctic Fox Tails Part 3

## Chapter 15 - Arctic Fox Tails Part 3

Sergeant Major Purple dashed up to a half way landing that ran around the level, and a large box with a cage door. "Now you're going to get it! Come forth, Mechanical Man number 8!"

Tails had simply picked Goku up by the shoulders, and carried him up to the landing. Now they stood there as a huge hulking figure slowly emerged from the cage, rising over the ninja who called it forth.

Tails was already analysing it, it looked like the description of one of the monsters he'd seen on some ancient pre-Mobian audio-visual records, a human with sallow skin, stitches across its face and bolts in his neck. There were no obvious ranged weapons, but sheer size and bulk implied it must be tough. But unless it was a lot faster than it had shown, it wasn't much of a threat.

"Have you ever seen anything so powerful, so terrible?" ranted Purple.

"Well big, anyway." replied Goku.

"We already defeated one android." Tails said, "Why should another worry us?"

"Fools, Sergeant Metallic was nothing compared to the power of this machine! Now go, beat them to a pulp, slaughter them, destroy them!"

Tails was ready for anything, laser beam eyes, rocket fists, flame projectors, everything but what happened.

The android spoke in a deep voice. "I don't want to."

The ninja did a double-take. "How funny, I thought you said you didn't want to!"

"It's bad to kill. I don't like bad." The mechanical man just stood there.

Tails was shocked. He'd been ready to jump into action, demolish it, but if it was disobeying a direct order, acting on a moral code which couldn't have been programmed into it, a conscience, then it had to be self aware. He'd almost destroyed a person, just because it... he was an android. He shuddered at the narrowness of his escape.

"We don't have time for your stupid mechanical humour! Just do what you were built to do!" yelled the ninja.

"You did bad things. You locked up the mayor and made him sad."

"The Red Ribbon Army made you! Are you going to disobey your parents?"

"I'm sorry, but you're bad."

"How dare you, you mechanical coward!" The ninja fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out a remote. "Okay then, if you insist on having a conscience, let me tell you something! We built a bomb into your body, in case you got uppity. I press this button, and you get blown to scrap! Now go destroy them!"

"If I have to be bad, I'd rather be blown up."

That clinched it, not that Tails hadn't already made his decision.

The voice of General White came over the speaker. "It's a colossal failure! Blow that junk heap to pieces!"

"Yes sir!" The ninja dashed past the robot, and at a safe distance, held up the remote, finger ready to press. A dramatic breeze fluttered his clothes. The mechanical man closed his eyes and hunched.

"Okay you metallic moron, if you have a machine god, pray!" His finger stabbed down, into his hand. "Ow ow ow! Where..."

"You don't hurt any more innocents! Now or ever!" Tails was standing a way beyond him, holding the detonator in one hand, and the battery pack from it in the other.

"I'll take... whooof!" the ninja had taken his attention of Goku, and the sai-jin bounded in, a glare on his face, smacking the ninja forward. "Like Tails said, you're not hurting anyone else. Rock, scissors paper punch!"

The ninja was sent flying, right over the interior forest, and into the far wall, where he collapsed, leaving a dent. "Serves you right!"

Tails came up to the android. "Sorry, I didn't know... I can remove the bomb, or at least disable it, after all General White might have another remote control."

"I'm happy, you saved me." The mechanical man smiled for the first time.

From the way General White was fuming over the speakers, it was clear he didn't have another remote. The mechanical man led them up through the next level, which was a maze, and past a large sealed off section. Goku started calling him 8-man, as Mechanical Man Number 8 was too long, and the android happily adopted the name.

On the way they found out that he didn't know what was behind the sealed section of the fifth floor, and that he was afraid to fight, despite his great size and toughness. At the top of the stairs was the door to the top level. The android pointed. "This is the 6th floor. The mayor is in there."

Goku just slammed the door open and strode in. "Okay, Mr boss bad guy, now you're going to get it!"



General White was standing by a console as the others filtered into the room. He seemed quite jovial, compared to his earlier fulminations. "Congratulations on reaching the top floor. It's only a pity the two of you can't be made to serve in our army."

"General White, stop being bad." said the android.

"So the traitorous tinker toy dares to speak! I'll give you one last chance to... co-operate!" His finger stabbed down on a button, and a large trap door, edges concealed by the tiling of the floor, fell away beneath them, dropping them into a pit.

"Wha... !"

General White smirked, and activated the button that opened up the partition between the chamber they were in and the monster of the fifth floor, the horrible Jiggler. He strode over to the trap door, just to hear a whirring sound as Tails rose out of the trap door, tails whirling madly, and hauling up Goku and 8-man by their collars, one in each hand.

He landed them on the solid floor, and dropped down beside them. "Close, General White, but you'll have to do better than that!"

General White sprang back to the console, picked up the pistol on it and fired. Ping, peyow!

"Ow!" "Hey!" Tails and Goku exclaimed, both glaring at him.

"Uh, didn't I hit you?" asked the General, non-plussed.

"You certainly did, and it stung too!" Goku replied.

"I think I've got a bruise, felt like a 0.375 calibre round." Tails said, rubbing his stomach. He glanced at the gun, "RRA munitions seven cylinder break action revolver. At least that's what it said on the butt plate of the one we used for testing. Lucky we trained up, or that could have actually hurt."

"That's... impossible! Okay, okay, I'll hand over the mayor..." If he could just get behind the console, he'd see if they could stand up to his 0.80 calibre, long cartridge hyper-gun. Only two shots, but they could crack the engine block of a truck. He moved over to the door to the Mayor's room, and pushed the button, only to have no effect.

"The door might work better if it still had these!" Tails said, grinning brightly and holding up a set of wires on a connector. "I sort of visited earlier. Goku, one Kamehameha to that door please."

Goku fired off his energy blast and blew a massive hole in the panel, to reveal the empty room, and the broken window.

Tails continued. "He's already safe, we just wanted to make sure all you bad guys were out of action before they called the police. Goku, he's all yours!"

"Fine!" spat General White, shrugging off his jumper to reveal a vest and weightlifters arms. The kids had to be running out of steam, didn't they? As long as he could circle to get the hyper-gun he'd play along. He brought up his fists, starting to move towards his goal. "Ho-kay, come at me!"

Goku just strode over swaying out of the way of the straight punch White launched, and kicked him lightly in the ankle.

"Yeaargh!" The General grabbed his leg and started hopping around.

Goku chuckled at the man's antics. But General White wasn't out of tricks. He looked over Goku's shoulder. "What's that!"

"Huh? Where?" Goku looked around, and White threw all his weight into a vicious punch at the kids gut, to Tails' outraged shout. Not that it did much, the sai-jin just looked back, grinning. "That felt like a fly landed on me. A punch is supposed to feel like this!"

Wham! General White bounced off the ceiling, and landed behind the console he'd been leaning on earlier. "Gah! He's got to be some

kind of monster!"

"You wanna fight? Well?" Goku stood there, ready for more.

The General had found his hyper-gun, and jumped up, swinging his gun to cover Tails. "Don't move! This hyper-gun could probably take even you down, and I'm sure it'll do for your furry friend over there!"

He moved back across the floor, backing away from the trio. "Don't worry, I'm not going to kill him, I figure if I just blow his leg off, you'll have to choose between chasing me and saving his life!"

"General White, I won't let you do another bad thing!" called out 8-Man, starting to step forward.

"One more step, you metal moron, and I'll put this bullet through his furry skull!" The General growled, and the android stopped.

"It's okay 8-man, Goku, I've got this!" called out Tails. He was calculating another trajectory.

"What, you're going to bleed on me?" the General sneered, stepping back.

Suddenly it was Tails' turn to stare past him, wide eyed. "No, wait!"

The General misinterpreted it as panic, and said, "Please, I'm not going to fall for that!"

His finger tightened on the trigger, and a number of things happened very fast. Tails had been focussing on the sound the mechanism would make as it cocked to fire, and his hand had flicked out as he heard it. The component he'd palmed from his pocket was flicked out with a whip crack report as it flew towards the hyper-gun's muzzle at the speed of a rifle bullet.

Goku started forward, ready to intercept the bullet with his staff, and even 8-man started to move, then White's gun went off. Tails had started to dodge even as the component left his hand, but it wasn't

necessary. The component lodged in the barrel, causing the heavy bullet to jam for a fraction of a second.

That was all that was needed, the barrel exploded, and General White overbalanced as grabbed his hand and face, injured by the shrapnel. This wouldn't have been a problem except he'd unwittingly backed up against the open trap door. He toppled in with a terrified yell, that ended abruptly with a slurping noise and some unpleasant crunches, finished by a burp.

Tails slid to a halt, looking sick. "I wanted to stop him before he fell in! I was sure the anti-recoil system a thing like that gun must've had would divert most of the shrapnel away from him. I didn't mean for him to fall into... whatever's down there!"

Goku came over and helped him up. "It's okay, it was an accident. If he hadn'ta tried to shoot you, he'd be fine!"

Tails' namesakes were dropping, but he visibly pulled himself together. "I guess you're right... I just wish..." He felt wetness on his cheek, his glove came away stained red. A fragment of the bullet or muzzle had clipped his ear, nicking it.

He pulled an engineers cloth from one pocket and wrapped it over his ear, forcing himself to think about what needed doing instead of the gruesome events below him.

"Goku, could you go and make sure that those pyjama goons downstairs are put in with the rest of them. Check them for weapons and capsules, I'm sure 8-man can help. Oh, the guys outside..."

"Brought 'em in before you got here." Goku gave a grin. "I figured having them get all frozen wasn't part of your plan either. Don't worry, none of 'em are going anywhere!"

Tails handed him a capsule. "Sleeping bags and stuff, we can sleep in that house on the fourth level. I've still got things to do up here..."

He turned to the controls, and pressed the button to close the trap door.

"Aren't we going back to Suno's house?" asked Goku.

Tails shook his head, yawning. "Uh uh! I'm betting the mayor's going to have to stay there tonight, it's too cold to move around, and the last thing they need is more guests. We can go there in the morning. Hope there's some of that pie left."

"Me too! C'mon 8-man, we've got some bad people to put away!"  
With that the sai-jin set off out the door.

Muscle Tower was still, silent, in the early morning sun. The villagers had initially gathered to muster for the guards, as they'd quickly found that failing to be there on time got their doors smashed down and them dragged there anyway, or worse.

However the appearance of the mayor and the unbelievable tale told by Suno's father, plus the lack of guards had them cautiously advancing on the tower. There were a few carefully hoarded hunting rifles, and a number of tools that would serve as weapons.

Suddenly, there was a call from overhead. "Hey there!"

Something dropped from the roof of Muscle Tower, dropping down to bound off out-stretched gun barrels, eventually landing on the first story parapet and bounding down to the ground. Goku was there in full cold weather gear.

Some of the guns were raised nervously, but the Mayor called out, "Wait!"

He stepped forward to meet the boy. "You would be Son Goku then?"

"Yup! Pleased to meetya! Tails will be along in a minute." The boy replied, holding out a hand. The mayor shook it, looking somewhat

lost.

A second, larger object descended from the roof, a massive man, drifting slowly down, but as he got closer, it became clear he was being carried by his shoulders by a much smaller fox, who was supporting them both on tails that whirled like helicopter blades. He lowered 8-man to the ground, then dropped alongside him. "Okay, that's all done!"

"Yahh! A monster!" exclaimed one of the villagers, and there were some other cries of alarm.

Tails looked a bit put out at the speaker, an Arctic fox in a hunters cap and quilted jacket. "Hey, I know two tails is a bit unusual, but it hardly makes me a monster! It's only one more than you have."

"I think he was talking about your friend with the bolts." The mayor responded.

"What 8-man? He's as much a victim as any of you people. He's an android built by the Red Ribbon Army, but he decided he didn't want to fight for them or do the bad things they wanted him to. He said it was because he was scared, but he was willing to let himself be blown up rather than attack us, and that's not the action of a coward. They put a self-destruct device in him... it's okay, I've removed it and disabled his receiver. "

Mechanical Man Number 8 raised a hand and waved shyly. "Hello there."

Tails was feeling a bit guilty about his own misjudgement, and it made him go on at more length than he intended. "He helped us defeat the Red Ribbon Army, and lock up all the soldiers. He's been a big help, and I think you guys could be a bit more grateful to him."

"Locked up? You mean you defeated them all?" Suno's father said, stunned.

"Well, there's other companies out there, but they won't have a chance to come here. But we've got all the ones here at Muscle Tower."

His expression turned unhappy. "Except for General White, he tried to drop us in a pit, but ended up falling in himself, and some big monster ate him. But that was an accident. "

"He threatened to feed me to that monster, called it the Jiggler!" said the mayor. "But the only way you could know that is if you'd met General White... it's really true! The nightmare is over!"

"Well we've got a few things left to sort out... 8-man?" Tails prompted. The android brought two big bags of capsules from his pockets. "Here's all their guns, ammo, vehicles... they'll have trouble causing any problems without these. They're sealed up in there with enough food to last them a couple of days, more than enough time for you to get the authorities out here."

He brought out another capsule, and popped it to reveal a radio, which he handed to Suno's dad. "Checked this before we came out, it should have more than enough range to reach one of the larger towns."

A memory unit was pulled from the pocket of his coat and placed in the mayor's hands. "I copied their records across, there's more than enough here to prove what they did to your people. I wouldn't access their computer directly, I wiped the last two days worth of records and planted a little computer virus I whipped up before I went to sleep last night."

The fox kit chuckled, looking his age for the first time. "The system is set up so their main base can interrogate it for information, and I'm betting it's considered part of the same network, so the security should be minimal. I repaired the up-link, so they should be getting my surprise package soon enough."

"Let's see, don't swim in the pool on the fourth floor, it has piranha in it, the monster you know about, bad guys out, we've just got to get 8-man settled, and find the dragon-ball, and we're done."

He put on his goggles and activated the dragon ball radar in his pocket for the first time since they approached Jingle village. While they'd been fighting, he'd put both radars away in his Capsule chest, so they wouldn't get damaged.

"Uh... wow, it's close..." He turned to face 8-man, who sheepishly pulled an orange sphere with two yellow stars inside from his pocket.

"You mean all the time we were slogging away outside looking for that thing, he had it?" Another of the villagers, a human with a walrus moustache, exclaimed angrily.

"I found it one day when they still let me out to work." The android explained, looking nervous. "But I heard that when they found it, General White was going to have all the villagers killed to keep it secret, so I hid it."

"oh!" Walrus moustache replied sheepishly, though he was a human, not a sheep.

Tails said, "We got the same thing from Colonel Yellow, the guy who was leading the Red Ribbon over in Karrin. That's why we were in such a hurry to go beat this bunch."

"Tails needs the dragon balls to wish himself home, so could we have it?" Goku piped in, his lessons from Master Roshi bearing some fruit.

"Take it!" The mayor said, "Those things are dangerous! Who knows who else will come after it! However, you son..." He looked up at the android.

"Yes Mr mayor?"



"No need to be so formal, m'boy. You've done us a great service, and I understand you need a place to stay?"

"Yes." The android nodded.

"I've decided, you can come and live with me! Me and the wife are alone now, so we'd love to have a young fellow about the place!"

"Thank you, Mr mayor, but I'm an android."

"Oh, who cares? You've proven your as good a person as any man here, and better than many!"

The android sniffed and wiped his eyes. "You're so good... I think I'm going to cry."

"Cry all you want, son." The mismatched pair embraced.

Tails started getting ready to lift off, when Goku stopped him. "Whoa, there was something else! Something really important!"

"Huh, I thought that was everything." Tails' brow furrowed as he tried to think of what else needed to be done.

"You forgot to ask if there was any Cloud berry pie left!"

Instant mass face-fault.

**Authors Notes:** Okay, that took too long. As it is I've trimmed it a bit from what happened in the manga. And yes, the who piece with Sgt. Major Purple does get that silly, in fact I toned it down a bit. One thing Akira Toriyama isn't afraid of is producing plenty of copy.

Don't worry, The next few parts will be a lot less dependant on the manga, and hopefully faster moving, though I do have a tendency to take a page just to clear my throat. I want to get past the dragon ball hunt as soon as possible, so we can start getting Tails home. Though I can assure you, it's not going to be simple, and will involve barrel rolls and true love.

You see I have this radical idea about Tails actually ending up in a stable relationship with a girl who won't turn out to be a killer robot, or an evil bitch, or a doormat, or even a sweet, gentle, nice girl who he then has to kill with a giant space gun. Shocking, I know, but then I like to push the boundaries.

# Tails of Two Balls

## Chapter 16 - Tails of two balls

"Well, they stayed the rest of the day, so they could get their clothes washed, and enjoy some real cooking, and then they set off to the south. Oh, and they hid away that ball so's those rotten Red Ribbons couldn't track them." The mayor finished off.

Major Motoki checked his tape recorder had gotten the statement. Then he looked over to where the defeated Red Ribbon Army goons were being marched in lines to waiting regular army transports, guarded by a mixture of troops, and a few rifle armed villagers.

Another old man chimed in. "You don't see many of those Kinto'un flying around any more, only the pure of heart could ride 'em, so nowherdays..."

"And you're sure you've told me everything?" The major asked.

"Yep! That's about all there is." The mayor said, decisively.

"Major!" One of the soldiers came striding over. "The big guy with the bolts doesn't want to move!"

The mayor rounded on the newcomer. "Huh? Why should he, he's not a part of the Red Ribbon Army, he's a part of our village!"

The major sighed. "We were hoping he could give us more information about their operational methods, after all he was on the inside."

"I doubt there's anything he could tell you that you won't get out of the others, or off that widget the young fox left for you." The mayor folded his arms. "My son hasn't done anything wrong, so your troops shouldn't harass him!"

The major came to a decision. The army had failed these people, the last thing he wanted to do was make things worse. "Very well. Sergeant, let him alone. Mr mayor, you won't mind if we leave a detachment here at Muscle Tower against the unlikely event that more Red Ribbon types come to check up on what happened? And if your... uh... son, should feel up to it he can discuss what happened with them."

The mayor nodded. "That's fine, yes, that should work out very well."

Major Motoki checked his watch, he had to be back in his own district by tomorrow, so he could be with the group that would collect the remains of the Yellow contingent from the Karrin Highlands. He really wanted to chase after the two youngsters, but his primary task seemed to be cleaning up after them.

The captures and information they were getting in response were bringing him to the attention of his superiors, and he'd even gotten wind of a promotion in the works (he was an intelligence specialist, after all). He felt a little guilty that he was getting the credit for someone else's work.

Still, the most important thing was taking down the rest of the Red Ribbon Army. He was already organising some quiet reconnaissance of the remaining dragon ball sites, and a force that would eventually be tasked with attacking their home base, but that took time, all the more so because he was certain they must have spies within the regular army, and he didn't want to alert them.

For now, all he could do was wait for Bulma to tell him where the next dragon balls disappeared, and hope the two kids didn't bite off more than they could chew.

"Goku, dodge, it's a rocket!" Tails yelled, veering off and down towards the Red Ribbon outpost, a pair of domes. Goku pulled Kinto'un up in response to the warning, as Colonel Silver launched the shoulder fired missile at him. The projectile wasn't homing, and shot under the zooming cloud with space to spare.

As Tails dropped to the ground, the Colonel threw down the expended launcher, and faced him.

"My men warned me the two of you would be coming. Not that it will save them from their fate when I get my hands on them! To lose the dragon ball to a pair of children, no matter what magic tricks you can pull..."

Tails just stood there, smirking slightly. Against Colonel Yellow, the fights had happened too fast for him to be scared, and during the Muscle tower episode, he'd been too worried about Goku, and not letting the Red Ribbon soldiers at the villagers to have time for being scared himself.

Confronting someone like this still made him nervous, but he wasn't going to let it show, or affect his actions. Hence the smirk, and the relaxed posture. Besides, Goku was there, and like Sonic, while the spiky haired one was there, Tails felt safe. Sonic would probably say something cool at this point, but just standing there not reacting seemed to get this guy as hot under the collar.

The Colonel yelled. "Answer me boy, before Colonel Silver gets angry! Why are you looking for the dragon balls, and how do you located them so precisely? And where is the ball you took from my worthless troops!"

Tails just let it wash over him. Somehow the fact that the other guy was losing it made him feel more confident. He decided to goad the guy, see if he could make him make a mistake. "You know, it would go a lot easier if you just surrendered like your men, and let us hand you over to the police. But I guess that's not going to happen."

Goku landed beside him. "This guy giving you any trouble?"

"Apart from ear-ache, no." Tails grinned, tweaking this guy's nose was fun. "He likes to talk about it though."

The Colonel was a tall, good looking human with spiked blond hair, wearing military issue trousers and boots with a gold buckled belt, and a trench coat. He also seemed to have forgotten to put on a shirt, though an ascot hung around his neck. He was also getting mad.

"How dare you ignore me! I see I shall have to teach you to not to underestimate Colonel Silver of the Red Ribbon Army! I think I'll start y stopping your breathing!"

He shrugged off the trench coat to reveal he'd clearly been on the Charles Atlas plan, solidly ripped musculature in his arms and torso. He suddenly blurred, and vanished. If he'd expected to take either of them by surprise, he was disappointed. Goku and Tails jumped away even as he started to move, splitting apart and landing some way from each other.

The Colonel came to a halt where they'd been looking back and forth. "So my men were right, you aren't just run of the mill brats. I may even let them live. The same can't be said for you though."

Goku called out. "Tails is right, you talk a lot! Even more than Tails, but at least he's usually saying something I need to know, you just like to be mean to people!"

Tails would have been annoyed at his friend, if he wasn't honest enough to admit that he was right. "He's all yours, Goku."

"Sacrificing your friend? How... practical." Silver sneered. "After I put your friend in the ground, maybe you'll be more co-operative. Oh, and don't run, I will track you down, and it'll only make things worse."

Goku just moved forward to face the taller man. "What's your problem? C'mon, stop talking and let's fight."

Even before Goku had finished the sentence, the Colonel lunged forward with a lightning fast, massive straight armed punch that would have stopped a truck. It probably wouldn't have stopped

Goku, or even Tails, but the young sai-jin hadn't let it land, fading inside the attack to put a side-snap kick into his gut.

Silver's eyes bugged out in a way which totally ruined the bishonen look he had going. As Goku stepped back, he clasped his hands to his abused stomach, gasping for breath.

"How... how dare you!" The Red Ribbon mini-boss essayed a kick of his own, a sweeping crescent that would have knocked someone's head off, but Goku just sprang over it, jumping higher than Colonel Silver's head, and diving in to drop kick him. The Colonel's eyes glazed over, and he collapsed face first on the floor.

Tails strode over, checking that the human was out cold. "Okay, I'll rig their radio to put out the 96 Mhz signal, and you go back and collect those other goons. I think that's everyone for this base."

Goku frowned. "Shoot, I hoped he'd put up more of a fight than that. Okay, I'll go get those other guys."

Tails dragged the unconscious Colonel inside, and put him in one of the rooms. Then he went and examined the radio equipment. He also checked the paperwork lying around, but there was nothing of use, local maps for the most part, and military looking paperwork, though a roster confirmed they had gotten all the RR goons from Silver's detachment. There was also a message form with some interesting news.

He collected a Capsule case, and various guns. He checked over the capsules, a general purpose robot, a jeep, a flying wing plane, a couple more supply crates, another rocket launcher, and a type 7 housing unit, basically a one room house with a shower, toilet and kitchenette.

Goku still wasn't back, and Tails noticed a couple of spare radios, and had an idea. He was still working on it when Goku dragged in the other goons.

"Whatcha doin'?" Goku asked.

Tails blew away the wisp of molten solder smoke that rose from a connection. "Just fixing up another little surprise for those Red Ribbon bozos. There!"

After they'd secured the Red Ribbon types, and set the beacon, he wrapped the modified radio in a plastic bag, and carried it outside.

"There's a radio message from their HQ that they've noticed the dragon ball vanish. That got me thinking. I know the frequency band that dragon balls transmit on, and with the spare dragon ball radar parts, it wasn't too hard to rig a radio as a fake emitter.

"I haven't had chance to analyse the variations between balls yet, so I can't make it a specific ball, but then I don't think they could tell either. I'm going to hide this well out in the bush, and they'll think the dragon ball has reappeared."

Goku chuckled. "That's gonna drive them nuts!"

"By the time we finally jump their main base, they'll be so mixed they won't know what they're doing." Tails chuckled. "In other words, they've been 'out-foxed'."

They planted the transmitter, and checked on the HUD's of their goggles that it was showing up on their radars. As they did so, another dragon ball disappeared.

"Huh? Where'd it go?" Goku was confused, but Tails already had his radar out and was interrogating it for the last known location. "It's the one being searched for by General Copper, down on the southern tip of the continent below Namu's village. It only just disappeared."

"Do you think the Red Ribbon guys got it?" Goku asked.

Tails shook his head. "Nu huh, They haven't been hiding the balls so far, the one... two at the Red Ribbon Army base are still showing. I



say we get over there and try and find out what happened!"

Even at Kinto'un's trans-sonic speeds, it took hours to reach the area where the dragon ball had been. It was hilly wild country, with a few towns and villages scattered about. Tail's improved radar system had the location down to a few metres, and it turned out to be a hillside meadow overlooking a forested valley.

They scouted round, someone had been there recently, there was flattened grass and faint scents which the keen noses of Goku and Tails could pick up. Goku thought a couple of them were vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place them. A road passed nearby, and they decided to follow it, and see if they could find anyone.

After a few miles, they came upon a re-fuelling station, the sort that was also a general store and camping area. An elderly fox was lying back in a recliner chair outside the store. He looked up from his paper at the new arrivals and his jaw dropped at one flying on a cloud, and the other simply flying.

"Well now, ain't that one heck of a thing..."

"Uh... good afternoon, sorry to bother you sir, but we need to know if you saw any strangers passing through here in the last few hours. Other than us, not that we're strange, or anything..." Tails rushed out.

The fox pushed back his straw hat back and scratched his head. "Y'know, come to think of it there was. Three of 'em, in a pretty fancy car. One of 'em, a fox was in a funny black pyjama type costumes, there was a tall human woman in a long coat, and they were being bossed about by this squirt in a fancy silk costume, I think they called him Emperor Pilaf. Acted as if he were doin' the ground a favour by walkin' on it, that one."

"They stopped here for fuel, and bought some snacks, about two hours ago. Weren't polite about it neither. I keep a decent stock, and

a clean place. Tweren't no need to call it a hovel. Why you lookin' for them, and how'd you do that flying trick?"

"Um... no time to explain. They may have something that I really need to find. Which way did they go?"

"That's the trouble with folks these days, always in a hurry." The fox pointed the way they'd been heading. "I overheard they were looking for a place to stop and have lunch, I suggested they could use the rest area here, but that Emperor guy just looked at me as if I'd dropped outta... well kinda sneering-like."

"Thanks, you've been really helpful." Tails exclaimed. "Uh, can your camp take a type seven capsule house?"

"I guess." The fox looked puzzled.

"I think it's only fair we should come back and stay here the night. Then we'll explain." Tails waved goodbye even as he tail-coptered into the air, Goku following on Kinto-un.

The fox thought he could half hear the younger one asking Goku to remind him of everything he could think of about 'Emperor Pilaf'.

Emperor Pilaf was laughing maniacally, his two minions standing to either side of him. As he was sat in a chair, a table with the remains of a fancy picnic lunch in front of him. The 'Emperor' was a short, blue babyish imp-like creature, wearing a red and blue striped cap, and a tabbard with a large kanji upon it, which for reasons best known to himself meant 'fried rice'.

"Ha ha ha! Those fools! Those Red Ribbon doufuses! They completely fell for the false information my spies fed them. With their primitive radar, by the time they realise they're searching the wrong area, we will have returned to my castle in the Diablo desert!"

"Truly, you are a genius, master!" Mai, a woman with long dark hair and a longer long-coat exclaimed.

The fox opposite her, Soba, added, "A brilliant plan sir! But, what of the monster kid and that two tailed fox? They have been collecting the dragon balls too, and they've fought the Red Ribbon Army for them."

"I... uh... that's classified information! As long as I have this..." Pilaf pointed to a small box on the table. "... it doesn't matter how many dragon balls they collect. In fact, I may well let them collect all the others, then reveal the location of the last one, only it will be a trap even they can't escape from!"

"Of course!" Soba said, nervously, "I never doubted you for a second master."

Pilaf fumed, "How that second rate tinkerer stole with my idea to create a shielded box that would hide the electromagnetic signatures of the dragon balls, I don't know! But he will never find this one, whereas my spy satellite has been tracking Goku ever since he approached his first ball. Even if they hide the balls, I will know exactly where they are."

"In fact, shall we see where they're blundering around right now?" He shifted around in his chair, then gave a meaningful look to Mai, who blanched, and lifted him down out of it. Popping a capsule made a large, boxy piece of electronics appear, the most prominent parts being a big screen and an upraised antenna, which scanned the sky for some seconds before stopping.

"When I checked this morning, they were heading south towards the Letmex plain, and the dragon ball there..."

The screen showed some lines of text, 'Linking to satellite... Connection established... Ready to display...'

A world map came up, with the last known position of Goku shown. A dotted line tracked down, stopping at the location of Silver's camp, then headed south east out across the sea.

"What?" Pilaf's eyes grew wide as it moved down to the bottom of the map and scrolled right until it was on the southern tip of the western continent, where they were. "Ahaha... they must have seen the ball vanish, but without it to track, they'll never find us here..."

"Of course, master..." Mai said nervously, looking around.

The track continued east. It stopped a couple of times, and soon moved on at the speeded up pace as the system scanned through historical data to find Goku's current position.

"Um... master, I know it's impossible for them to track us, but they are pretty close, less than a hundred kilometres away. Maybe we should pack up and leave." Soba asked, looking over his shoulder.

"Nonsense!" Pilaf stated, "They may know where the dragon ball was, but now they're searching blind. Where as we know exactly where they are... or will in a few moments..."

The map vanished, and the screen displayed 'Current Location of Target Acquired.'

The image firmed up, a real time video from a high angle showing Goku centred in it. He was on Kinto'un, hovering over a road somewhere and looking off road at something out of screen.

"Wow, that's pretty good imagery for a high altitude drone... no, a satellite from the antenna design, that's some awesome kit!"

Pilaf preened. "My own private dragon ball detector and spy satellite..." He suddenly realised it was someone looking over his shoulder and looked around. "Waaagh!"

It didn't seem possible that such a short guy could jump so far sideways. He pointed a shaking finger at a kit who was pretty awesome himself, hovering there on his tail-copter. "You... how did you..."

"There was only one route a car could have taken..." Tails wasn't about to involve the friendly garage keeper.

"You okay, Tails?" Goku called out from the roadside, his voice echoed by the receiver.

"Fine, but watch his minions... Wow, it has sound too, but how... oh I see. You must use laser reflectance as a reference to compensate for atmospheric distortion, and pretty good optics, so imposing the laser on the optical path and collimating it wouldn't be a problem.

"Since you already have a laser reflecting, you probably pull the same trick as my old electro-binocular design and use the variations in Doppler shift in the return signal to detect the vibrations, but noise... aha, synthetic aperture adaptive optics, multiple small mirrors each with it's own laser from a common phase source, that's how you do it! It would also make for a lighter primary optic, important in a satellite, and a more robust one."

Pilaf fumed. It had taken him months of work, and not a bit of stolen technology to develop his spy satellite, and this infuriating fox had just reverse engineered the design from a cursory glance at the down link. He decided a good sneer would put this upstart in his proper place.

"Yes, I am Emperor Pilaf, the invincible! My genius is so great, even you can not deny it. That is why I am destined to rule the world! Ha ha ha ha!" He was just winding up to a good round of maniacal villain laughter.

Goku, who was watching from the roadside, called out. "I \_figured\_ he was plotting something evil again!"

Tails just frowned. "What \_is\_ it with you people? I mean, even if you could rule the world, what would you do with it?"

"Well first I'd..." Pilaf stalled, "... well I'd... that's classified information!"

Tails just sighed. "Well you're not doing it with the dragon balls, that's for sure. And since you are evil, I've got no problems taking the one over there!" He pointed to the box on the table.

Pilaf jumped back, shocked. "But how... my specially designed compact anti-radar shield container is impervious to the electromagnetic signature of the dragon balls! There is no way your radar should be able to detect it!"

Tails grinned. "Well, apart from the fact that you've just confirmed it's in there, it's a metal box, the only one around. The easiest way to block the radiation is with a Faraday cage, a metal box. Or metal wire, if the gaps are smaller than the half dipole length of the frequency you're shielding against. But you know that."

He shrugged. "I don't know why you're making such a big thing about it, it's basic physics. I banged one together in about 5 minutes out of panelling from a wrecked Red Ribbon Army truck, and most of that was polishing down the edges to get a good electrical connection."

Pilaf dashed over, grabbing the box. "Since you're so interested in my technology, let me show you another piece. It's a pity it's the last thing you'll ever see!" He motioned to his minions, and they lined up, all three throwing down capsules, which poofed out into three robots, no powered armour suits, with open hatches in the front.

Pilaf jumped into a spherical one, with short arms and legs. Mai, the tall human woman took the largest, a bulky body and gorilla-like arms on stubby legs, while Soba's had legs that were anything but stubby, more stork-like, with a small spherical body, arms tipped with guns, and a segmented metal tentacle 'tail' that ended in an ominous looking nozzle. An equally ominous conformal tube was mounted on the underside.

Goku jumped off Kinto'un to land by Tails. "Great! We get to fight! But why are they in those metal things?"

"Suits of powered armour to amplify their strength. Like those robots at Muscle Tower but with a person inside, like a vehicle." Tails brushed at his fringe. They looked tough enough to be a serious threat, but he wasn't going to let it shake him. Besides, robots were what he needed practice fighting. "From the design, I guess they can combine, head, body and legs to form a giant robot."

Obviously the units had external microphones, and speakers, as Pilaf replied. "Yes! My metal behemoths, the invincible Pilaf machine! Against them any mere human is like an ant.. a small ant... with an injured leg... and they will crush you both to dust!"

To demonstrate his power, one armoured fist slammed down on a two metre diameter boulder, which split in two. "See! The Pilaf machine is invincibly powerful! Surrendering your dragon balls is your only hope of survival... Hey, pay attention when I'm menacing you!"

Tails and Goku were playing a game of rock scissors paper.

"What are you two doing!" yelled out the so-called Emperor.

"Deciding who gets the third suit." Tails replied, looking up from their game. "Normally I'd let Goku do the fighting, as he enjoys it more than I do, but I'm the one training to fight robots for when I wish myself home." He went back to the last round of the game. "Aww! Scissors beats paper, okay, you get the third one!"

"You want to die that badly?" Pilaf called. "Alright! Mai, Soba, show them how terrible this machine really is!"

"Uh... Me sir?" Mai asked nervously.

Soba looked equally worried. "Yes, as our Emperor, we wouldn't think of taking the honour of striking the first blow from you!"

Pilaf fumed. "How dare you argue with me, do you not trust the Pilaf machine?"

As they argued, Tails muttered to Goku. "You take the body one on the right, I'll take what's left. That leg unit has the only range weapons... I'll deal with them first." They slapped palms together. "Then let's do it, to it!"

(Tails... fighting a giant robot? This requires music. Sonic 3 boss music to be precise. [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=7K0vXW7O\\_Zc](https://youtube.com/watch?v=7K0vXW7O_Zc))

"Okay, if you're not going to attack, we will!" called out Goku, and bounded forward with a flying kick. Before Mai could react, the massive body robot was body slammed backwards, crumpling the plating where Goku's kick struck.

Meanwhile Tails dashed forward, becoming an orange blur. Soba stood stunned for a second, but he was a ninja, with ninja reflexes, and almost immediately brought up his twin arm mounted machine guns to shoot the young fox dashing towards him. The twin streams of bullets crossed where Tails had been a fraction of a second ago.

Now he was in action, as always there wasn't time to be scared. Tails was continuing to refine his threat hierarchy, and generate a tree of tactical responses, wishing he had enough experience, and enough ability to do it the way Goku and Sonic did, choosing the right action instantly, as if they were just making it up as they went along. Of course they had to have planned, Sally always said, 'Failing to plan, is planning to fail.', but they made it look effortless.

Soba switched to the metal tail, which proved to be a flame thrower, incinerating the ground in front of him, but Tail evaded, diving to one side and scooping up a loose rock from the ground for further consideration, as he turned his dive into the beginnings of a Tail-spin Attack, tumbling forward to come up and boost himself into the air as he went under Soba's left arm.

The glowing orange disk sheered through the robot arm, leaving it to clunk uselessly to the floor as tell-tails on Soba's console started to flash and warning sounds hooted through the cockpit. Tails came out of his spin as he rose over the robot's upper surface, the reservoir



for that flame thrower was in the main body so simply sheering it with a continued Tail Spin would cover him in flammable liquid.

Instead he dropped onto the tentacle, just behind the nozzle, even as it swayed about and Soba tried to lock onto the errant fox. Sitting astride it, Tails slammed the rock into the nozzle, jamming it in well. Then he dropped off, pushing himself downwards and going into another Tail-Spin to sheer off the robot's other gun arm.

Since Pilaf could barely see the orange blur of Tails, he tried a cheap shot on Goku as the kid landed from his strike on Mai. A steel fist as big as Goku's head tried to remove said head. Goku didn't even dodge, just turning to catch it in an upwards X-block, then wrapped his arms around it and threw the machine to smack into a rock near Mai's.

Tails deliberately jumped well out in front of Soba's mecha, standing there and giving him the Red Eye. It was childish, but effective as Soba tried to incinerate the fox with another flame thrower blast. The jammed nozzle caused massive back pressure, and the igniter blew the whole assembly off the end of the tail. Burning liquid spilled out onto the main body of the pod until an automatic cut-off stopped the flow and emptied the tail.

Tails couldn't resist a quip. "I guess your tail is now ended, and you're unarmed too!"

But Soba wasn't out of tricks. he took his chance with Tails in one place, whipping out the damaged 'tail' tentacle to wrap around the young fox's torso and arms, attempting to squeeze the life out of him with the power of a drill press. He hauled him up, having the brilliant idea to slam the fox head first into the still burning fuel on the body of the pod.

Tails saw his peril and strained to get free, then decided on an easier solution, spinning up his tails before using them like a circular saw to slice the section of tentacle between him and the main body. Two

tails proved better than one, and the coils of tentacle dropped away dripping machine oil.

That still left Tails far too close to the flames, and too near to stop himself on his tails. So he pushed forward instead, putting out both arms with fists extended and dented it's upper hull, then did a handspring off the top of the machine, flipping over and landing behind it with fists flaming. Fortunately, the Mobian materials of his gloves were fireproof. He shook off his hands, and the flaming fuel burnt out.

"Are these guys even human?" Pilaf muttered to himself, shaking his head to clear it.

"Emperor, they're too powerful!" called out Mai from the pod beside him.

Pilaf was too dazed to argue. "Very well, we'll use the maximum power form! Team Pilaf, Merge!"

Soba's mecha dashed over to them, arm stubs sliding in to be covered by hatches. Both Mai and Pilaf's units lifted themselves on rocket motors, Mai's suit's legs retracting into it's body, while both arms and legs on Pilaf's did the same.

A bracket extruded from the top of Mai's machine, and Pilaf's landed on it, clamps locking into place, while the cavity into the base of Mai's vehicle slotted neatly over the top of Soba's pod, latching onto it.

"Hey, it turned into one of those robots, just like you said!" Goku exclaimed.

"Bwahaha! Well? What do you think of our power now?" Pilaf gloated.

Goku pulled back his hands, while Tails tail-coptered up and forward, veering round a wild grab by one arm to Tail Spin attack and sheer

through it at the shoulder. He flew back under it's legs, punching up at the housing on the under side of Soba's pod just as Goku finished his wind up and launched a Kamehameha which blew off the other arm and a good chunk of the machine's shoulder.

Mai exclaimed, frantically manipulating her controls. "Lord Pilaf, I get no response! Pod 2 is totally totalled!"

"And that was a light one!" called out Goku.

Tails flew back to land beside Goku, and punched the air. "Yes, two for two and... aww heck, and I already used the dis-armed thing! Uh... you're out of weapons and out of luck."

Pilaf fumed. "Grrr! Not quite, you brats! Launch the really big powerful killer missile of death!"

The flaps on Soba's pod opened, and smoke vented from them and the under-slung launch tube, but nothing else happened.

"Lord Pilaf!" Soba's voice called out, panicking. "The missile has gotten stuck in the launch tube, and it's armed! If it doesn't impact anything in 15 seconds, it will safety detonate!"

"Well don't just sit there! Stop it! Do something!" cried out Pilaf.

"I can't, it's irreversible!" Soba wailed.

Emperor Pilaf, would be ruler of the world, reacted with his normal decisiveness and dignity. "Waaah! Abandon robot!"

"Uh oh. I figured it for a launch tube and sorta kinda accidentally on purpose dented it a bit!" said Tails to Goku. "I just expected to disable it!"

He dusted off into the air as Pilaf's pod launched itself off the doomed machine on it's rocket engine. "Goku, you go get Pilaf, I've got a rescue to do!"

The hatches on Soba's and Mai's units popped open, and they jumped out, hoping to get far enough away from the blast radius. And it was likely to be large, the flame thrower reservoir had ruptured, and the highly volatile fuel vapour had flooded the machines interior cavities, creating a fuel air bomb. Tails intercepted them both, zipping in on his tails to catch first Mai by the scruff of her long-coat, then diving down to grab Soba with his other hand.

He zoomed away, just as the two remaining components of the invincible Pilaf machine went up in a massive fireball. The size of it meant both of them would have been caught in the blast, and most likely reduced to smouldering ash.

Mai looked as confused as Soba. "Why... why did you save us? We were trying to kill you!"

"Because I could." Tails replied, quietly, his earlier playful demeanour gone. "You may be minions, working for a villain, but you're both still people as well. I won't let people die when I can save them, even if they are bad people. That doesn't mean I won't use whatever level of force needed to protect innocents from you, but that doesn't apply here."

Tails landed back by the car, and released them. "Now we wait for Goku to get back."

**Authors Notes:** Whew! Long time no post! I hit a bit of a block during the introduction of Pilaf, but I finally powered through it. This adds two more dragon balls to the roster. All we need now is the one that's underwater, and the two that are at Red Ribbon Headquarters. Of course, that doesn't mean it's going to be easy.

As to the missile, people who know the DB canon, will remember that when Goku faced the Pilaf machine on his own, he kicked the missile back at them. That never made sense to me, surely a ground to ground missile would be impact fused, and that rapid a velocity change would set it off.

So I tweaked things. A techie like Tails would have identified the weapons the robot was carrying, and built systematically removing them into his attack plan. Of course, no sensible designer would have a warhead that armed before it left the launcher, but maybe it malfunctioned. Likewise, any sensible designer would rig a warhead that missed it's target to blow up at the end of it's run rather than falling and taking out something you didn't intend.

As for the size of the explosion, in canon, the rocket hit the outside of the mecha, wrecking it but not really doing much damage to the occupants. Partly this was probably slapstick effect, but I'd say a lot of the explosion dissipated in open air. Here the explosion was inside the mecha which had already been damaged, and the fuel vapour from the flame thrower added to the effect. In the original, the flame thrower tank presumably didn't get damaged until the rocket hit it.

# Spy Tails

## Chapter 17 - Spy Tails

Goku quickly arrived with the head pod, which was minus arms and legs, but plus Pilaf. He politely wrenched off the hatch, and the diminutive would-be Emperor staggered out, collapsing on his face.

Goku reached in and plucked out the box Pilaf had. "Okay, I've got the dragon-ball!"

Tails popped his capsule chest, and got out the bigger box. Opening them both, he tipped the one star ball in alongside the four star ball from Karrin, the two star ball from Jingle village, and the six star ball from the Letmex plains. He capsulised the chest, and put it back in his capsule case, in an inside zipper pocket, along with the captured one from Silver's HQ.

He'd heard an alert beep from the HUD goggles that were still on his head, so there was a possibility that the balls' momentary exposure might have registered with the Red Ribbon Army's radar. If only there was a way... He glanced over at the satellite uplink.

"Mind if I borrow this?" He asked the two minions who were making their master comfortable.

"Uh.. Blagh... grilled cheese..." mumbled Pilaf, who was clearly still out of it.

A moment's examination and a bit of fiddling allowed him to work out the controls. He punched up the co-ordinates of the Red Ribbon Army main base, and homed in on the signals of the two dragon balls. The satellite was clearly fairly far south, as he was seeing the scene from about a 60 degree angle. Fortunately, that was perfect for his plans

A few more adjustments and he'd homed in on a tower, which contained the dragon balls from the satellite readings, and a window in the top level. He cut in the audio and was rewarded with shouting. He could just barely see the bottom halves of two people, as they were standing well back from the window.

"Imbeciles! My so called army is searching full force for these dragon balls, but we only have two to show for it! And now the rest are vanishing without a trace! Has there been any contact with General White?"

A deeper voice responded. "No Commander Red, though we've collected the standard reports from Muscle Tower, but the last few days of data have simply been erased. I'm afraid Colonel Silver has failed to make his regular report. The dragon ball is still in his area though. It's quite mysterious."

"What's mysterious is how a moron like Silver ever became a colonel! As for that idiot Yellow, he should have been here days ago!" The first man stepped up to the window, and Tails got his first good look at Commander Red. The commander was a short man in an expensive suit, with red curly hair and side burns. One eye was covered with an eye patch.

"It is possible that he was way-laid by the same thieves that destroyed his unit, sir."

"Hmmmph! A two-tailed fox and a child? I'll believe it when I see it. If they finished off Yellow's unit, I should thank them for removing a lot of incompetent nincompoops! As of now, Yellow is under execution order! And send a scout to see what has happened to White."

"Yes sir." The other man stepped up beside him, a tall, black skinned man with a bald head. "General Copper is still searching for the dragon ball that just disappeared a few hours ago."

"Anything more on that?" growled Red.

The black man disappeared, and Tails could hear a low voiced phone conversation. At the end he came back. "There was a momentary signal a few minutes ago, but it vanished before our radars could isolate it. It could be anywhere on the west of the continent. Remember, the intelligence we had didn't completely match our best guess at the location even before that."

"You think someone's playing games?" The commander frowned, or rather frowned more. "Have Copper pull out. Send him to relieve Silver, and if that idiot isn't searching with every resource at his command, he'll join Yellow up against the wall."

There was the sound of a knock on a door. The black guy moved away presumably to answer it. "Adjutant Black sir! I have a report from our mole in Military Intelligence. A regular army force was sent a few hours ago to Jingle village! Our unit is under arrest!

"The entire force there was defeated, and if the preliminary reports are right, by two children! A boy with spiky black hair and a two tailed fox, just as Yellow reported! They've been identified by Military Intelligence as Son Goku and Miles Prower, two runners up in the Strongest Under the Heavens martial arts tournament!"

Tails watched the screen for several minutes as the pair absorbed the report.

Goku was helping himself to the left-over picnic. "What's a regular army? And Military Intelligence. I thought those guys were going to be turned over to the police?"

Tails shrugged. "They're like the police, but they deal with big groups of bad guys, with nastier weapons. Capsule Corps makes most of their stuff. I guess it makes sense, considering how big the Red Ribbon Army is, and how many weapons they have."

He shook his head. "Those two said they had a spy for the Red Ribbon Army in there somewhere. If I remember Nichole's historical files on how armies worked, Military Intelligence the part of an army



who find out things, like where the bad guys are. Aunt Sally always calls Military Intelligence a contradiction in terms, but that's because she's always been annoyed that the Kingdom of Acorn army were caught so unawares by Robotnik taking over.

"We've got to let the army guys know that there's someone working for the Red Ribbon Army among them, and that they should send more people to Colonel Silver's location to catch this General Copper and his goons. Looks like that fake dragon ball signal worked better than I'd hoped."

"Fake dragon ball?" Soba actually looked up from tending his master at that.

Tails grinned. "Yeah, I set up a radio to put out a signal that looks like a dragon ball on a radar. Boy are they going to be surprised when they find there's nothing there!"

Sounds from the satellite uplink made him turn back.

"If these reports are true, I begin to see why our regular forces had so much trouble with them." Commander Red mused. "At least none of those idiots who were captured can give away the location of our main base."

"Uh, sir, that may not matter. If these two children have an accurate radar of their own, the two balls we have here show them exactly where our base is."

Commander Red blanched. "This is... this is a disaster! Is there any indication they've passed the location on to Military Intelligence?"

Adjutant Black responded. "No sir, they seem to be following their own path, and letting the military pick up after them."

Commander Red slammed down the papers. "We must find them and kill them before they have a chance to. Our greatest weapon is surprise, fear and surprise, fear, surprise and a fanatical devotion to

taking over the world, and Red Ribbon branding... Hmph hmph. If our base is discovered, we will have to relocate, or fight the full forces of the regular army."

"They still have to pass General Copper and General Blue, and he is the strongest of our field force leaders." Adjutant Black stated. "And even if they get past both of them, and collect both dragon balls, they will have to face the full might of this base, and all our most advanced weaponry."

Commander Red mused. "Speaking of advanced weaponry, didn't our spy at Capsule Corps mention someone called Prower? Yes, that was a fox as well! He was providing them with new technologies. How is the spy getting on with stealing them?"

"Working on it sir, they're keeping development to a fairly small team, and security is tight, but he hopes to get in on it when they expand development after the first load of experimental materials is landed from their orbital factory."

"Tell him to expedite! We must have those developments for ourselves! And find out more about this Prower who seems to be the source of it."

"You think it could be the same fox?" Adjutant Black asked, surprised.

"Of course not! It's hard enough to believe a child is a martial artist, either of them. Having one of them be some sort of scientific genius is beyond ridiculous. However, they're almost certainly related. If we can threaten the child, maybe we can stop any further work for Capsule Corps, and force this genius to work for us."

Commander Red turned away from the window, pacing back and forth. "As for them getting past our field forces, we can't take the risk! Increase our defences here, and send for Tao Pai Pai! I don't care how powerful these brats are, they will be no match for the world's greatest assassin."

Tails noted the gasps from the two compus mentis members of Team Pilaf.

"Commander? With our field deployments, we can't increase active manpower much even by pulling everyone we can off secondary operations."

The Commander pulled out a cigar and lit up. "Then get manufacturing to build more automated weaponry! I want missile launchers, gun turrets, drones, and tie them into our central computer! Even if we have to evacuate, I want to decimate any regular army force that attacks. Or these two brats!"

"And Tao Pai Pai?"

"We will know soon enough where those brats strike next. Send those photographs of them, and messages to Copper and Blue to alert us the moment they're spotted in their operations areas. We will dispatch Tao Pai Pai to annihilate them as soon as they're spotted... hmm... if a capture is possible on the fox, have them do it, but getting the dragon balls takes first priority!"

"Yes sir!" Adjutant Black stepped up beside him.

Commander Red glared up at him. "How many times have I told you not to stand right next to me! You make me look like a midget!"

"Sorry sir!" The scene dissolved.

As the screen faded back to a map, Tails turned and said, "This is a cool piece of kit! However, we can't afford to have you tracking us..."

He started working with the controls some more, getting out of the scanning program, and into the satellite control coding. He worked for several minutes, and the screen went blank.

Mai had recovered enough composure to glare at him. "What have you done? Did you destroy it?"

Tails ran a gloved hand through his fringe. "It's still there, but I ordered it to shut down it's main and back up transponders for two weeks and go to minimum power mode. You won't be able to access it until then, and by that time we should have collected the dragon balls and I'll have made my wish, which means they'll be stone and not putting out a signal.

"I know Goku will have the four star ball, and there's no way you or any other bad guys will get it away from him, so no-one's taking over this world with them. I had hoped to use it some more, but I can't guarantee that even if I uploaded security lock-outs, you couldn't find a way to bypass them and get control away from me. This way's safer."

He turned to face them. "You recognised the name Tao Pai Pai. Who is he?"

"Yeah, he sounds really powerful!" Goku added.

The two henchmen, well hench-woman and hench-fox looked at one another for a second. Years of working together meant they didn't really need to speak. Should they be helping out these two, when they were clearly Lord Pilaf's enemies? But they did owe the young fox their lives, and while they might be bad guys, they had a code of honour, however twisted. They nodded, and turned back to Tails.

"He's a monster!" stated Mai.

"He's a demon!" added Soba.

Mai continued. "He's the world's most powerful and most dangerous assassin. It's said he charges 100 million zeni per kill. You may be runners up in the world martial arts tournament, but if the stories are anything to go by, he's far more powerful than any of the past winners!"

"I heard he killed the members of the Zorun mob, a hundred strong, and all powerful martial artists, using only his tongue!" Soba said. "I

even heard he's the brother of Master Tsuru, the Crane Master, the most powerful martial artist in the world."

"Uh huh." Goku wasn't about to let this pass. "Master Roshi is the most powerful martial artist in the world!"

Soba glanced down at the symbol on Tails' clothing. "The invincible Turtle master? You were trained by him? I heard they were brother schools once, but they had a falling out."

Mai was as surprised as anyone else at the fox ninja's knowledge. "I didn't realise you knew so much about it!"

Soba grinned for the first time since they'd met him. "I am a ninja after all! Gathering information is what I do best! And I follow martial arts. I should have figured out who these two were just from the descriptions. You guys created quite a stir in the southern provinces!"

His expression became more serious. "But if you're thinking of going up against Tao Pai Pai, I have only one thing to say. Hide the dragon balls before you meet him, so after he kills you, the Red Ribbon Army doesn't get them. The only one who should rule the world is Emperor Pilaf!"

They flew away, but Tails landed short of the camp site, and popped the capsule house. True to form, it had the Red Ribbon logo on it, but a few moments work using his spinning tails as a buffing tool erased it.

When they reached the camp-site, Tails had Goku send Kinto'un off carrying a note with a message for the mayor of Jingle town to pass on to the military guys about their spy, and that the second Red Ribbon Army detachment was being sent to reinforce Silver. He also added the information about the spy in Capsule Corps, and that whoever it was would be one of the people joining his old development team.

They set up for the night at the camp site, and Tails gave a highly edited account of what had happened, and a rather less edited account of their histories to the old fox that ran the place. He also took advantage of the cooking facilities of the capsule house to make them both a proper, and large, meal.

He finished first, and sat there staring into his sweetened mint tea, as Goku demolished the rest of the food. The sai-jin eventually sat back with a sigh of repletion, and noticed his companion's brown study.

"Hey Tails, what's up? We're doing great!"

Tails looked up. "That's part of the problem. I don't know just how powerful this Tao Pai Pai guy is, but He sounds pretty bad. Even if we managed to get the dragon ball from under General Blue's nose, we'd still end up facing him at Red Ribbon Army HQ. Plus we need a way of searching underwater."

"I can take him, and I can swim real good too! So can you after our training!" Goku grinned.

"It may take more than swimming to get the dragon ball... Apart from any thing else, we can't afford to be predictable." He was in full Sally Acorn, tactical analysis mode. "I was thinking we can stand a change of pace, and confuse those goons further. They expect us to dash straight for General Blue? Then we don't.

"I suggest we split up tomorrow, when Kinto'un gets back. You go back to Karrin, and climb that tower where the hermit lives. I know you wanted to do that. It'll also be a chance for you to get much stronger, and so we'll have a better chance against Tao Pai Pai when we fight him, and General Blue."

"Cool! That's a good plan!" Goku said brightly, then looked puzzled. "But why aren't you coming? You could get stronger too!"

"I'm not sure I could keep up with you. Besides, I need to find a junk yard, and a machine shop, and build us a submarine, a vehicle that goes underwater, so we don't have to hold our breaths and swim to find the next dragon ball. I've got a few other ideas for levelling the playing field against Tao Pai Pai, if we need it. I'll need about a week, will that be long enough?"

"To climb that tower? Easy!" Goku nodded. "I'll see if this hermit guy can give me extra training, as well as this super strength water. I'll see if he'll give me some for you too. But why don't you just go to Bulma for one of these submarines? Or get her to help build one?"

"The Red Ribbon Army was a rival of Capsule Corps, and we know they have a spy there already. Now they know who I am, I don't want to draw any more attention to myself, or risk anyone else if they try to come after me."

Goku nodded. "I guess that makes sense."

Tails sighed with relief. "Then we have a plan. I'll set your goggles to provide you with a homing marker to find me after seven days... no I'll give you a manual trigger too, so you can find me if anything unexpected happens. I'm not sure we can maintain comm contact over such a distance though."

"It's okay Tails, I'll be okay, and you will too." Goku said. "You're really good at this planning thing."

"Thanks!" Tails replied, taking a sip of his mint tea. "I just hope I'm good enough!"

And so it came to pass that a certain two tailed fox dropped out of Deuce Juice mode near South City, and landed well outside it. The two friends had eaten a hearty breakfast, courtesy of Tails, and had made the first stage of their journey on Kinto'un, courtesy of Goku, but rather than take Goku any more out of his way than needed, Tails had decided to go the rest of the way himself.

He'd chosen South City as the closest large city to the section of ocean that had the dragon ball in. He'd considered stopping off at the Turtle House with Goku, which was actually a lot closer, but he wouldn't find submarine making materials there, and he didn't want to draw attention to Master Roshi either.

He popped the capsule house and ducked into it for a few minutes, coming out disguised. He was wearing a shirt and set of overalls, without a Capsule Corps logo, and the baseball cap which did, but adjusted so his fringe was tucked under it. Most awkward of all, one of his tails was stuffed down the leg of his pants, leaving him looking like a regular fox kit.

He walked into the suburbs of the city until he found a public call booth. A few moments accessing the classified directory, and he had a list of possible places to look. He wished he could make a call to Bulma, just to say hi, but the same reasons applied for secrecy as with Master Roshi.

Before looking for a junk yard, he found an office supply store, for drafting tools and paper, a drug store for some black fur dye and a pair of reading glasses with earpieces suitable for fox ears, and a diving equipment shop, for some books on under water gear and a price on equipment and gas fills. From what he remembered, regular air under pressure could be really bad for you. It ate into his remaining funds, but it was necessary. A quick stop at a public restroom, and he'd given his ears black tips with the dye, and put on the glasses.

Having prepared as best he could, he started his tour of scrap heaps. The second place he came to felt right, somehow. 'Lee Kie's General and Marine Salvage and Spares' the banner sign said, in both alphabetic and ideogramatic script, 'We fix anything!', another smaller one boasted. It was a large open lot with high fencing and a wide gate, and inside, a junk yard with everything from cars to toaster ovens stacked up in avenues and towers.



There were several sheds and frame buildings scattered around, as well as converted shipping containers, and he could see what looked like a pretty complete workshop from the gate. Off in the distance, a magnetic crane could be seen operating over the tops of the stacks of junk, and there was a banging and clattering of metal.

There was also a large tractor, or some kind of agricultural vehicle, in the front yard, parts scattered around on a tarpaulin next to the engine, with several boxes of tools. A panda in worn and oily overalls was looking up at it, scratching his neck and frowning.

Tails walked in and observed it, and after a few seconds the panda observed him.

"Hey kid, it's dangerous around here! Can't you read reading?" The panda pointed at a sign inside that said, 'Heavy machinery at work. Enter at your own risk!'

"Uh, are you Mr Lee?" Tails asked. He's picked up quite a bit of the ideogramatic script in passing, and knew people with their names spelled in it, like Son Goku, had their surnames before their first ones.

"That's my name, don't wear it out! What's it to ya, looking for an autograph?" The panda could have been saying it in a nasty way, but his tone of voice indicated he was more amused than anything.

"I need materials and access to machine tools for a project I'm working on, but I don't have the money to just buy them, so I was hoping I could work it off in trade."

"Kid, this ain't the sort of place you can go wandering about to get parts for a soapbox racing cart. You're not big enough to help move stuff around and we don't need anyone to make the tea." A couple of other workers had shown up, and were watching the show.

"I make good tea, and I'm stronger than I look, but that wasn't what I was offering." Tails replied, staying calm about the size comment.

"Your sign says you repair things. I'm a good mechanic, I can help. I can fix that tractor for one thing."

That got a laugh, not just from Mr Lee, but from the other workers.

"Kid, I admire your spunk, but that piece of junk has been sitting here for three months, ever since it was towed in. Everyone in the yard has had a go at it, but it's well and truly busted." The panda smirked. "If ya could fix that, I'd let you work here as long as you wanted!"

Tails grinned back. "Then we have a deal!"

"Hey whoa! I didn't mean..." The panda started to move to intercept him as Tails strode over to the tractor, but when the child pulled out a Capsule case and popped what looked like a pretty complete set of tools, he came to a stop in surprise. He was half ready to go over and pull the kid out before he got hurt, but something stopped him.

After about 5 minutes buried up to his tail in the inner workings of the machine, Tails pulled out. "Okay, I see what the problem is... I should be able to make this work with a few bits and pieces. I bet everyone thinks it's a problem in the fuel injector array."

The panda looked surprised. "It is! But I've replaced every part of it, reground the toggles, checked for leaks and drips... and it still floods every time you turn it over."

Tails shook his head. "The mechanical parts are fine, it's a problem with the engine control computer, and intermittent fault from the looks of it. Look here! Someone hasn't been bringing it in for scheduled maintenance, and an initiator is out of alignment. That caused arcing that must have caused a frayed control line and fried parts of the processor. The timing of the control signals is all shot."

The panda came over and examined the interior, guided by Tails' pen light. "I don't see... Yeah, I see. Oh panda, that's out of the way, no wonder no-one spotted it..."

His shoulders slumped. "Darn it! If you're right, there's nothing for it but to pull the computer and get a replacement from Capsule Corps... good eye kid, but Panda it's going to cost."

"Uh uh! I said I'd fix it, and I'm going to!" Tails moved off, and pulled open the hood of a wrecked car that was sitting near one of the junk piles.

"Hey, careful kid!" The panda came over, only to see Tails pull out some electrical components, he then did the same for a radio and a toaster oven. Sitting back down on the tarpaulin, he popped another tool kit with electronics tools, and some boxes of parts, and started wiring together some sort of circuit.

"You can't be thinking of making a replacement!" Mr Lee exclaimed.

"No, but I don;t need to." Tails stated confidently. He pulled out a battered, older model pocket computer and plugged it in to the circuit, while attaching other leads to connectors on the engine control computer. He started working on the computer, sitting there cross-legged on the tarpaulin. Satisfied that the kid was doing something fairly harmless for a change, Mr Lee took the time to chivvy the watching workers back to their own tasks.

When he came back, Tails was half inside the engine casing again, and the circuit lay discarded on the ground. The young fox levered himself out, holding a soldering iron in one gloved hand a wrench and some solder in his other, and the penlight in his teeth. He put down his tools and gave a muffled sigh, then removed the penlight from his mouth so he could give an un-muffled sigh.

Oddly enough, the panda felt sympathetic. Clearly the youngster had thought he could do it, and the way he'd handled the tools said he knew something of how to, but it had clearly been too much for him.

"Okay kid, I've got to admit you might know a bit about gadgets, but reckoning to fix that computer was a bit too ambitious."

Tails looked around in surprise. "Huh? Oh no, it's done. I was just replacing the affected wiring so it won't happen again. Go on, try it!"

Not quite believing, but doing it anyway, the panda mechanic climbed up into the cab, and started the engine. It rumbled, juddered, and roared into life, running sweet as a nut. Which was what he thought the situation was, nuts. He turned it off.

"Okay... What did you do?"

"A lot of Capsule Corps motors use P-13 series processors. Part of the memory is a field programmable array, to allow for firmware upgrades. I learned Capsoft Process Control language for something I was working on, and I had a compiler/decompiler on my computer. So I built an interface circuit, and pulled the base control algorithm from the intact P-13 from the car, then did a comparison.

"From that it was easy to see where the scrambled sections of code were, and I copied it across, modifying the code where necessary to allow for the differences in engine design, but it was easy to deduce the new parameters from the engine geometry. Then I just uploaded the repaired code into the firmware section, along with an interrupt to divert the control flow from the damaged part." The young fox shrugged. "Simple enough really. I can walk you through what I did if you like."

Years of working the scrap metals trade had given Lee Kei a finely honed sense for when people were swinging the lead. For a moment he considered that the young fox was trying to snow job him, but quickly discarded it. The kit showed no signs of dissembling, clearly he thought he'd done exactly what he'd said. The panda had heard enough technical ramblings to identify this as the real deal.

He got the feeling the fox was hiding something, but whatever it was, it didn't relate to his skills. A quick examination of the open engine compartment certainly supported his claim, the fused wiring was neatly replaced, and the general state of the engine was good.

The kid had talent, which made what he was about to say no fun at all. "You do know I was only kidding about the job. I never expected you to take it seriously, let alone fix the thing!"

The way the kid's shoulders slumped made him feel like he'd just kicked a friendly puppy. "I... hoped that I'd impress you enough that you'd figure it might be worth a go."

"Hey, I am impressed, but... you should be getting home to your family."

"They aren't around." Tails responded, and half to himself. "Not in this dimension anyway."

Mr Lee might have worked in a noisy environment for years, but he had better hearing than Tails imagined. On dragon ball earth, Tails' literal comment had a rather different meaning. His guilt level rose to 'hung a friendly puppy up in a sack, and used it as a pinata'. So that's what he didn't want to say. Poor kid... "Hey, do you need food, cash, a place to sleep? You're rather young to be out on your own."

Tails shook his head as he put his tools away, capsulising the tool boxes as he filled them. He was unhappy at that last comment, at Capsule Corps he'd gotten used to being treated like an equal, a skilled professional. He'd forgotten that most people would just see a child. Getting access to the gear he needed would be harder than he'd thought, but if he wanted to be accepted as more than a child, he'd have to act like one. So he quashed his initial reaction, and answered politely.

"I'm okay. I can take care of myself, and I have a little money left. Not enough, though, to buy the materials I need, or hire a workshop. I guess I'll look elsewhere. Thanks anyway."

He gave a brief but genuine smile, and turned to leave. "I just wish people would judge me more on my abilities, rather my age..."

As he walked away he was already working on alternate plans. He'd find another way, just like he'd told that tiger-girl. There were other junk yards, he'd try each of them, but if they all proved as tough to convince as Mr Lee, he might have no other option but to fly back to West City and see if he could hook up with Bulma and use her workshop incognito...

Meanwhile, Lee Kei was having a crisis of conscience. The fact that the kid had taken it so calmly only made him feel worse, roughly at 'performing live vivisection on a friendly puppy with a spoon and no anaesthetic'. "Hey, wait up kid! Y'know, when you said that, you sounded a lot like Miles Prower."

That stopped Tails dead. Had his cover been blown? He turned back. "M... Miles Prower?"

The panda grinned. "I can tell you're a fan, you've got the white gloves and sneakers, but then half the kids I see are dressing up like him. Not that I blame them, he's quite a hero."

That stunned Tails. In truth, his gloves and boots were a conscious effort to dress like \_his\_ hero, Sonic. He'd always wanted to, and had the chance when a Freedom Fighter salvage party, lead by Sonic, had stumbled across a mostly intact tailoring shop from before Robotnik's take-over.

They'd managed to get a functioning replicator back to Knothole, and part of the limited base materials they'd been able to bring with it had been used to fabricate gloves and boots based on Sonic's, and made of the same dirt resistant, flame proof, pretty much indestructible materials as his.

They'd been the best birthday present Tails had ever had. Of course, he'd had to wrap his feet in several layers of cloth to make the shoes fit at first, but he'd was growing into them. The gloves had been reprocessed several times, but he didn't expect his hands to get much bigger.

But the idea that kids were dressing like \_him\_ was a concept that would take some getting used to. To be honest, he should have changed the boots and gloves as part of his disguise, but he just hadn't considered it. It would be like cutting off one of his tails. Fortunately, it hadn't given the game away, yet.

The panda's eyes were distant. "I was there, you know, when I saw that little fox step out against that Namu character, I figured it was a gag. Second most amazing thing I'd ever seen, the way he moved, especially the second fight against Son Goku. I'm one of the people who'd have been flattened by the kid when he went ape if he hadn't acted as fast as he did."

"Only the second?" Tails couldn't help but ask.

The panda looked back down at him and grinned. "Not casting nasturtiums on your hero there, kit, the most amazing thing was his intending to just give away the prize money, to irrigate that village's crops, and getting his friends to go along with it. From what I heard, he found a way to do it, even without the prize money."

He shook his head. "I guess if one kid can show that much gumption, there could be others. Okay, I'll do it. I'll fix you up. There'll be a couple of rules though. I can't have someone standing over you while you use machine tools, so 'll want to see you can operate the tools safely before I let you use them. If something is too much for you to shift, you don't try. And no goofing around, I'm trusting you to be responsible. Do we have a deal?"

Tails' face lit up. "Yes! I'll be careful."

"Hey, I forgot to ask, what's your name kid?"

Tails was prepared for the question, he'd decided on an alias from the name of a character in a story Aunt Bunnie had told him, originally from a pre-Mobian AV record. Aunt Bunnie told the best stories, and this one had struck a chord, being about a kid who wanted, needed to be accepted as something more than just a kid.

The young fox kit held out a hand. "Call me Jim Hawkins, pleased to meet you."

**Authors Notes:** Darn, I expected to get further than that. But things kept suggesting themselves to me. I like to keep throwing in these little flash-asides to the Sonic Sat AM universe background, because it is a fascinating setting. I justify devices like the clothes replicator, and the earlier mentioned carni-culture machine, as collateral applications of the same molecular scale manufacturing technologies that ultimately produced roboticisation, invented by a Mobian, Sir Charles Hedgehog.

Something like that couldn't spring ex-nihilo from an inventor, no matter how brilliant, without a basis of existing knowledge and technologies, any more than you could expect a functioning electronic computer from a society that doesn't use electricity. It's a quantum advance, like from Eniac to a Cray supercomputer, but ultimately uses the same underlying technologies.

So they must have the knowledge, and that would have a myriad of more basic applications. It also explains a lot of the manufactured items and infrastructure in the Sonic Sat AM setting, things that require large industries for us to produce, but which the Kingdom of Acorn didn't seem to have. The one thing it couldn't do was quickly produce huge numbers of war machines, which is why Robotnik got to build factories.

I call the general trope 'Narnian economics'. Look at the items and objects described during the meeting between Lucy and Mr Tumnus, from brown paper, to string, to bound books and sardines and ask yourself where he got them. Where are the canneries, fisheries, paper makers, agriculture... At least in the Sonic setting I can justify it.

As for the chapter title, in the first part he's spying on the Red Ribbon Army, and in the second, he's going undercover, hiding his identity in the best secret agent tradition.



And yes, the version Tails heard from Bunny was Treasure Planet, not Treasure Island.

Oh, and one other thing, hiding his extra tail. I call on the 'Compressed hair' TV trope. No matter how huge the hair, in anime you can always hide it under a hat. Dragon ball is an anime, and a fox or wolf tail is mostly hair.

# Junkyard Tails Part 1

## Chapter 18 - Junk-yard Tails Part 1

The kid was like some kind of machine. The repair work was something of a side business, and had backed up a bit in recent weeks, partly because of the problem tractor, but this Hawkins seemed good and determined to fix everything in the backlog before the sun set. Lee Kei figured himself a fair mechanic, but the young fox was spooky.

Jim contemplated a device for a few minutes, maybe examining a few parts, tracing the design of a mechanism or taking voltage measurements from a piece of electronics. On rare occasions he consulted his computer, which seemed to have a lot of reference works and parts catalogues on, or one of the catalogues in the shop. Then he found a replacement part from the piles of junk lying around, or made one from scratch, and fitted it, and it worked.

Lee Kei really had to be getting on with his own work, but he'd stayed to check that the kid was checked out on the machine tools in the work shop. He needn't have worried, Jim was careful, and at least as handy with them as he was himself. After seeing a toaster oven that had defied his own best efforts at repair pop up a perfect piece of toast, he had to ask.

"How can you possibly do that? Figure out what's wrong so easily?"

The young fox just looked up from where he was examining the circuitry of an old television, and munching on the piece of toast. He seemed confused at the question. "I just figure out how it's supposed to work, then find the place it isn't... It's a puzzle, and I guess it's just something I'm good at, and something I enjoy."

"I'll say!" The panda replied. "I'll be back later, kid, then we can see what you need for this project of yours."

The fox mused, "A place to put it together, a space in one of those container units would be good, and as for the design, I really need to look around your junk yard first and figure out what I've got to work with. See you later!"

It was evening, and Tails had left the junk yard, and headed well out beyond the city limits to set up the Capsule house and get to work on a design. A tour of the junk yard had given him ideas, and allowed him to meet some of the guys working there. They seemed nice, if a little unsure what to make of him. That and cleaning up one end of a container unit had taken up the rest of the work day.

One of the things he'd seen on his tour had set him practically drooling, though at the moment it was of no practical use. Ever since he'd seen those ancient pre-Mobian AV records, he'd always had a soft spot for bi-planes. To find one sitting out there in the back lots of the yard was cool.

According to Mr Lee, it had been there since before he'd taken over the business from his father, who'd taken over the business from his father, who'd won it from a friend in a game of Mah Jong. It was half wrecked, the fabric of the fuselage and wings tattered, the engine unserviceable, the frame warped or broken in places, but it was the real deal. Apparently the reason it was still out there was that it would have cost more to junk it than they'd get for the parts.

He'd gotten Mr Lee to promise to keep it until he could come back with enough money to buy it, and fix it up, so he could learn to fly it. That led to a discussion of pilot's licences, and what you had to do to get one. Not an idea he'd ever been exposed to, in Knothole, there were always more vital jobs to do than people to do them, and all that mattered was that you could do something.

Getting a piece of paper to say so seemed a bit redundant, but different world, different rules. He intended to check if you needed one of these licenses for a submarine. He'd had to suppress a smile when Mr Lee had stated that he was still too young to fly.

He'd found various pieces of machinery that could be useful and sparked an inspiration which had come together while he made dinner, and followed it up with tearing through the books on diving and some additional research on the pocket computer. He'd taken the time to build up a complete technical library while helping out at Capsule Corps, and while he remembered a lot of it, he wanted to double-check everything.

Now he was set up with paper and pen, ready to start planning the design of his very own submarine. This was going to be \_fun\_.

"You want to build that?" asked Lee Kei, aghast.

Tails nodded. He'd quickly realised that he wouldn't be able to do this without letting Mr Lee in on his plans. He'd worked throughout the morning, and shown him the plans after lunch. But that brought it's own problems.

"I've seen everything I need here, including the parts to built the induction furnace and specialised tools for the hull shapes. And the parts you don't have, I already salvaged elsewhere, like the jet bike that forms the basic frame, and the capsules needed."

"And where did you get that kind of hardware? A Capsule system adds around 200000 zeni to the ticket of a vehicle!"

"One of the places I visited, there were a bunch of wrecked and abandoned vehicles with intact Capsule systems. I got the permission of the guy who owned the land to salvage them, he didn't want them there, in fact he was happy I was clearing away the junk." Which was true enough. Bora's tribe claimed the Karrin highlands, and he'd been happy to get rid of the Red Ribbon Army hardware.

Tails continued. "I was going to take them direct to Capsule Corps for recycling, but then I figured how I could use some in this design. It's not like using them will hurt them any, and as soon as I'm finished with it, I'll return them. I mean, gosh, I know some of the components from your yard, like the big induction motor and the 75 Amp hour

lead acid batteries are worth a lot, even as scrap, but as soon as we've finished using the sub, I'll bring it back, and you can remove them."

"Why do you need 5 batteries anyway? Well I can see that, the power requirement for the big motor means you'll get 10 minutes of full power out of one, if that. But that battery compartment is only big enough for one of them, and I don't see any way of exchanging them, let alone doing it underwater. "

"Oh? I guess the main schematic doesn't make it very clear. See that tube from inside the rear passenger compartment?" He unrolled another blueprint.

"It takes this. Each battery has a Capsule system, and the controls are cross linked in an array. As each battery reaches 15 percent charge, it automatically capsulises itself, and decapsulises the next one in the array, which slots in it's place. The capacitor array here provides power during the change-over. And the Capsule array gets loaded and ejected via the tube, avoiding having to leave the pressure hull."

"That's... brilliant! But why do you even need to eject it? Oh, I see, the vehicle can be capsulised, and you can't capsulise one Capsule in another. Okay, I admit this is ingenious, but I still say a duo hover-craft/submarine is not something you can put together yourself out of scrap. Capsule Corps is about the only company that makes them, and even they'd have difficulty with something like this."

"And the cheapest ones cost 4.7 million zeni, on up." Tails didn't add that Bulma could probably gotten him the loan of one, contacting her was still a last resort. "Actually, the design is very basic, limited by the materials I have access to. Besides, it's safe. I've done structural calculations, and power requirements and figured in safety factors and back-ups all the way through.

"You can see here, the heliox re-breather masks switch to un-powered open circuit in the case of a double canopy failure and both

main and redundant power supply failure, and the hull design means I can always manually drop weight and vent the buoyancy chambers to generate positive lift, so even dead in the water, I can make a controlled return to surface."

He pointed at some fittings in the "And if we need to leave the sub, we've got duplicate face-masks with a self contained supply, and both cockpits can be flooded and vented using these valves here. All the controls are sealed and water-proofed. So we always have a way out."

"And there you are, in the middle of the ocean, dead in the water." The panda folded his arms.

"Oh, no, we have a cover aircraft, but it's my friend's, and he's using it at the moment." Once again, true enough, Kinto'un could do the job, but it avoided the fact that they didn't need it. Goku could swim the maximum hover range of the vehicle, and Tails could fly it.

"And who's going to pilot the thing?"

"I will. I'm designing the controls, and know exactly what it should be capable of, and what I need to do in it. The hover system is gyro-stabilised, with a full auto-pilot. It will practically fly itself. The same is true for submarine operation. It's practically a matter of telling it a destination, and switching it on."

"You still need a license, and there's no way you'll ever get one."

"Actually, I don't. I went to the public library during lunch and checked. A surface effect hover vehicle only needs a licensed driver on the road, and submarines just don't. Since I'll only use the hover system between the beach, and the dive site."

Tails had heard about public libraries in Nichole's historical briefings, but this had been the first time he'd ever had chance to look in one. The idea that you had all that cool knowledge, just waiting there... He'd had to remind himself several times that he was there for a

reason, or he'd never have left. Still he'd make the time to go back and see if they had anything on the Red Ribbon Army.

Not that that would help convince Mr Lee. The young fox sighed. "How about this. I build it, I test it. If you're not completely satisfied it works safely, it doesn't leave the lot."

"I still want to know what all this is in aid of. This whole business seems crazy."

Tails couldn't help but wince. Keeping things secret was not something he enjoyed. He decided he had to say something. "My friend and I are looking for something I vitally need, something we believe is in the ocean to the south. Unfortunately, there are some not nice people who are also looking for it. I need to build this sub, I need to build it quickly, and I need to build it quietly, and without them finding out."

The panda metals merchant wasn't stupid, and picked up on what he hadn't said. "You think they'll come after you... and any one who helped you."

"If I thought for a second I might be putting you, or anyone else in danger, or getting you into trouble, I'd be walking out of that gate right now." The panda could detect the iron sincerity in the foxes voice.

"That's why I don't want to say anything more. If no-body knows anything more, no-one can tell it, even by accident. That's as much as I feel safe saying, and if it's not enough, I'll have to go, and find some other way to do it. I've got to come back anyway to return those parts, hopefully by then there won't be any more need for secrecy, and I'll tell you everything."

Lee Kei wasn't entirely happy, but the way the kid had done his best to be honest, even about when he couldn't tell anything, weighed heavily against that. Besides, he was a techie type himself, and

interested in seeing if this thing would even work. If it did, it was going to be amazing.

"Alright Jim. You can build it, but I want two things. To see it working and tested before I pass on it."

"I said you would!" Tails said, then looked puzzled. "What's the second condition?"

"I want to help!" The panda grinned.

Tails split his days between mornings working on repairs, lunches in the library and afternoons working in the workshop. In that he was aided by Lee Kei, who spent what time he could spare machining pieces to the planned specifications. The other workers quickly got used to the young fox's presence, and the imprimatur of their boss, and Tails' friendly attitude and willingness to listen to their stories and boasts as he made minor repairs on the various equipment they were using quickly won him acceptance.

The next few days passed quickly, and profitably.

(Montage equals scenes, a change of tense, and BGM. 'MacGuyver title theme' go! [youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=dSuxm\\_UqezE](https://youtube.com/watch?v=dSuxm_UqezE). Well sort of...)

Images of Tails scavenging from all over the junk yard, removing bolts, collecting pieces of machined metal and mechanisms, and lowering them onto a trolley to hide the fact that he could easily carry them. Pieces being transported to the container, and other parts, any Red Ribbon logos carefully removed, being decapsulised. Work lights are set up inside the container, and plans are pinned up on the walls...

Then construction begins. Tails strips down the jet bike, using a cutting torch to peel away the wrecked hull and re-shape the frame with new parts, extending it. Other assemblies come together under his gloved hands, a rebuilt surface effect hover system, pumps, and



actuators, demand valves, and an induction furnace built from coils of copper wire, electrical switching gear and an old ceramic storage vessel, mounted on the frame of an old cement mixer.

Sparks fly as scrap titanium from other wrecked vehicle hulls is dropped in, and a massive throw switch is pulled, sending tuned currents through them, and melting them. Sand and common household chemicals is mixed into a clay, and the clay is shaped into casting forms shaped by the mathematical calculations of Tails' hydro-dynamic flow designs. The metal pours into forms, and is left to cool as Tails slots a large electric induction motor into the front of the frame.

Chambers and compartments and wiring and salvaged electronics all fit neatly into place in the frame, and the first tests of the electrical connections are done. Tails spends more time with his pocket computer, supplemented by salvaged computer hardware, writing control code and re-purposing systems torn from a dozen different sources to fit into his design, a mug of mint tea never far away. The core was the main processor from a personal robot that was in one of the Red Ribbon capsules from Silver's base.

Valves and pressure cylinders are slotted into place, and re-purposed hydraulic hoses connected to them via electrical and mechanical valve systems. Spare pumps are rebuilt as test gear, and so are several old and radios, as linked dragon ball radar and sonar systems are mounted in recesses. So are manipulator arms from the robot, with a few additions, and some water proofing.

Finally the new hull goes on, welded in piece by piece, and the twin canopies, fabricated from sections of hover patroller wind-shields are lowered into place. Then pressure tests and control system tests are carried out, Tails slaving over his carefully built up hardware, pumping systems and computers, usually under the watchful eye of Lee Kei.

Finally, the pressure tests show no leaks, and the control and sensor systems give prefect feedback, and the panda nods his approval,

letting Tails sit back and breath a sigh of relief.

(BGM ends)

Tails was pleased with how things were going. Lee Kei's help meant the sub had been finished two days ahead of schedule, and Kinto'un had brought a message from Goku, a missive of few words and appalling handwriting, but heartening content. He'd climbed the tower, not once, but twice, after the Master, Karrin, who'd turned out to be a cat, insisted he go back down and fetch some extra soil for his senzu bean plants.

These amazing beans each apparently were equal to ten days food, and instantly healed any injuries. Goku had to play a game of tag to get the water, and while he hadn't yet, he was getting closer, and getting additional training doing it.

Tails had sent back a message telling him of his own progress, but not before making sure he told the little cloud how helpful he'd been. He wasn't sure if the cloud was capable of appreciating it, but it seemed to perk Kinto'un up, and he'd rather err on the side of over-estimating how smart it was than underestimating.

He got back to working on the bull-dozer that was currently failing to doze. They were in one of the back lots, and the driver was sitting back on a chunk of debris, while Tails fixed the left handed framwinkle that had gone out of alignment. Behind them, the big crane was lifting a load of 18 inch metal piping, while nearby another load was being stacked together by a couple of workers, and Mr Lee was directing the crane operator..

Tails closed the access panel and looked over at the driver, a big ox in a muscle t-shirt who was inevitably nicknamed 'Tiny'. "Okay, it's good to go!"

"Thanks kid, I..." There were shouts and an ominous creaking of metal from above, and the pair of them looked up. One of the blocks that held the cables that kept the pipes level had slipped, and the

entire set of pipes was starting to tip and slide out of the cables that supported them.

Tails calculated a projected trajectory faster than an air-to-air missile and didn't like the result. The pipes would scatter, and it was almost certain some of them would hit the work crew, who had frozen at the sight. Tails didn't even have to think, he just bounded away from the digger and jumped straight up, engaging his tails in mid-air.

The leg of his jumpsuit ripped open as his second tail came out and twisted with the other to spin up. Tail slammed up underneath the pipes, pushing the whole lot back up beyond level, then zipped around the top and pulled together the loose tie cables, taking up the slack in the support by hauling upwards with all his might and both his tails.

"Quick! Get away! I don't know how long I can hold it!" He yelled to the people below, who finally got over their shock and started running. He spun round to talk to the crane operator. "If you could lower it, gently..."

People under stress do strange things, and unfortunately, the crane operator had his moment. He pushed the control a notch too far, and the other end of the pipes dropped faster than Tails could compensate for. One pipe slipped away from the others despite Tails' last minute attempt to catch it between his feet, and started falling out the other side.

At first it looked safe enough, the people had run out of the immediate area, but his calculations showed it wasn't. It would land on one end and topple into a stack of junk, which would topple in turn, causing a domino effect, and he couldn't predict if one of those dominoes would collapse on someone.

He couldn't leave the main pipes, they might do the same thing, but how to stop it? He only had two hands, and two tails. Then he realised, he also had two feet... He looked around for a possible way to use it and his eyes lit on the bull-dozer blade. Lightning

calculations of the stack's height, width and composition gave him a target, and provided a trajectory, even as one foot slipped down and pulled his other boot over his heel.

One thing all that bullet-time target practice had given him was a good eye for trajectories, so he drew back his foot and kicked with confidence. The boot rocketed straight and true for the bulldozer blade and rebounded with an audible ricochet into the stack of junk opposite, low down. The stack swayed back, as key parts were knocked out of it's front, then tumbled forwards, away from the other stacks and into the open area as the loose pipe landed, cushioning it.

The junk buried the second set of pipes, but no-one was there any longer, and that was the extent of the damage. It didn't even reach the bulldozer. The crane operator finally got his act together and lowered the stack Tails was holding to the ground. When it rested on the junk, Tails let go with a sigh of relief, and flew, hummingbird-like over the junk until he swooped and picked up a red and white boot, scuffed, but otherwise unharmed.

He also retrieved his baseball cap, which had come off at some point. His fake glasses were just plain gone. He landed by the bulldozer and sat on it's step as he pulled the boot back on. It was a few moments before he realised that the others were returning. Mr Lee had a hand on his chest, and Tiny was helping him. Tails jumped down and hurried over.

"Oh my gosh! Are you okay? You didn't get hit by any flying debris?"

---

"Just winded... Jim, or should I call you Miles?" the panda asked.

He saw the kit look down and away, unable to meet his eyes, running a hand through his now revealed fringe. Tails took a deep sigh and replied, "I'm sorry I lied about who I was, well technically I didn't, I just said call me Jim Hawkins, not that it was my name. But that's just playing with words. I did trick you, exactly as I meant to. I

just... I had to. I explained as much as I could, but explaining would have put you at risk."

"Whoa, no-one's gonna throw nasturtiums kiddo!" The panda said, waving his hands in a warding gesture. "I accepted your reasons, though I'd like to hear more. I was just going to say thanks for saving my two tone hide again."

"Yeah, I had no idea we had Miles Prower working for us!" said the bulldozer driver, a big ox everyone called 'Tiny', for some reason that escaped Tails. "Why'd you pretend to be someone else? I've seen the replays on TV, but I didn't really believe it until I saw it for myself! So what do we call you?"

Tails looked around, no-one seemed angry at his deception, and came to a decision, a relieved one. "Normally, I'd ask you to call me Tails, because that's what my friends call me, but if we can keep on pretending I'm Jim. I will explain why though, I guess you all deserve that."

Lee Kei ordered a break for everyone, as pretty much everyone in the yard had come to see what was going on. They convened in the rest hut, and Tails told his story.

"You're going up against the Red Ribbon Army?" Lee Kei said at the end of it. "Funny, you don't look suicidal."

"So far, Goku and I have been winning, and I'm hoping to keep them mixed up enough that we'll keep on doing it. But you see why you guys need to keep this absolutely secret. If they came after me here, I'd probably survive, unless they called in Tao Pai Pai or a really big bomb. You might not be so lucky. Remember what they were going to do to Jingle village."

The panda looked around his workers, and nodded. "Okay 'Jim', we'll stay quiet. I just wish I could let it out, the publicity would be great for business."

Tails shrugged. "After the Red Ribbon Army is defeated, I'll make sure to tell people how helpful you've all been. It's the least I can do. I've figured out just how much the parts I've used cost, even second hand, and the work I've been doing doesn't come close to covering them.

"I've learned to handle money since I've been here, some anyway, but I never really applied it to getting parts. Hopefully, recovering them after I've finished with the sub will square things, but I still owe you a great deal for helping me out like this..."

"Forget about the money kid." Lee Kei said. "Saving my life twice, and my business, an accident that bad might have finished it, you get a \_major\_ discount."

Tails shook his head, looking regretful, but determined. "I can't accept that. I don't save people for money. It's my duty as a martial artist, plus it's the right thing to do."

"You're something else kid." The panda shook his head ruefully. "Okay, then call it a contribution to kicking the Red Ribbon Army in the... tail, and getting you home. Besides, the way this thing is shaping up, it'd be a crying shame to take it to pieces anyway."

"Thanks!" Tails heaved a sigh of relief. "It's the first real project I've put together on my own. I mean, I designed stuff for Capsule Corps, but most of the development and construction was done by other people. But the Sea Fox \_feels\_ like it's mine. I'm glad I don't have to scrap it."

Lee Kei felt good, if a little embarrassed at the gratitude radiating off the young kit. To cover it up, he coughed and said, "Okay, we've had enough of a break. We've got a yard to clear up, and metal to shift."

Tails looked down at his legs. "Um, I'm going to need a few minutes, I've got something urgent that needs doing!"

"What!" asked Lee Kei, worried something else was wrong.

"Sew up the leg of my overalls, I kind of ripped them when my tail came out."

Face-faults all round were the order of the day.

The rest of the time passed uneventfully, and Tails had chance to work on a couple of other things that needed doing. However, the end of the week soon came, and a message from Goku that he was coming to meet Tails. When he did, the young fox was going to have a little surprise for him.

# Junkyard Tails Part 2

## Chapter 19 - Junk-yard Tails Part 2

Tails met up with Goku outside the city limits to keep their cover. Following the homing signal Tails was sending on his goggles, the sai-jin dropped out of the sky on Kinto-un, then started looking around.

"Hey, have you seen a fox, a lot like you, but with two tails?" he asked Tails.

Tails shook his head and lifted his Capsule Corps baseball cap. "It's me!"

"But, where's your other tail?" Goku said, surprised. "You didn't lose it did you?"

"Down my pants, it's part of the disguise." Tails replied, if his disguise was fooling someone who knew him as well as Goku, it must be effective. Of course, what he didn't realise was that changing his hairstyle and wearing a sign saying 'Not Tails' would have been as effective. Goku, while undoubtedly one of the most epic martial artists ever, was not good at seeing through disguises.

The fox held out a straw hat. "Here, I have a hat for you. After the Strongest Under the Heavens tournament, everyone around here knows me as the two tailed fox, and you as the spiky haired kid."

"Well I'm now the spiky haired kid with a tail!" Goku said proudly, turning to show the monkey tail that once again depended from his pants. "I've been practising your tail-copter move too, and training my tail so I can attack with it!"

"That's great!" Tails still felt guilty about removing the old one. He pointed to the goggles on Goku's head. "In that case, remember, full moon's only three days away!"



"I know, that monster's not gonna get a chance to hurt anyone else!"

"Good." Tails grinned. "Okay, so how did you get it back?"

"Well I was really hungry after I climbed the tower, twice, so Master Karrin gave me one of his senzu beans."

"Those magic beans your letter... oh, 'heals any injury'!" Tails shook his head. "Should have worked that out myself."

Goku shrugged. "It's okay, I don't know who was more surprised, me or Master Karrin. Even with the extra strength from my tail, it still took me three days to get the water."

"So did it work?" Tails asked eagerly.

"Sorta... it was just rain water." Goku admitted ruefully. "The old cat explained that it was climbing the tower to the look-out, and training to take the bottle from him was really what made me stronger."

"Well, let's find out!" Tails said, putting on his goggles. He fiddled with the controls for a few seconds, then exclaimed. "Thirty eight! That's awesome, my signature at rest is around twenty three!"

Goku looked puzzled. "Huh? Twenty three what's?"

"I don't measure it in watts, I set the one as the output of a regular human... I guess I should explain. We'll have time while we walk to the junkyard."

"Walk? We could run, or jump on Kinto'un, or fly ourselves... I want to show you my tail-copter..."

Tails looked around and waved at him to quieten down. "Remember, we don't want to draw attention. I came too close... Put on your hat, and we can be two kids out for a stroll."

As they walked, he explained. "It started with my plan to identify the individual radio signatures of the dragon balls, so you could always

find the four star one. Since I'd finished the sub, and the big container I was using as a workshop was metal, I rigged it as a bigger version of a Faraday cage."

"Like that box you keep the balls in?"

"Yup. Of course, I had a radar on the outside, ready to detect if any signal leaked, so I could put them back before the Red Ribbon homed in on them. Tracking different balls was easy enough, I just needed to refine the resolution, most of it was software..." Tails stopped himself as Goku's eyes visibly glazed.

"Anyway, I did it. Then I got interested in how the balls were generating the signal, and what they were made of in the first place. With all the old TV's and electronics, it was easy to build an electron microscope, X-ray diffraction scanner, and spectrographic transmission analyser... the bottom line is those things aren't made of any kind of normal matter, and there's no known energy source to generate the signals.

"I was stumped, then I had an inspiration. Every time someone around here, including me, ties the laws of physics in a bow knot, they use ki energy. Unfortunately, I still haven't figured out a way to detect it directly. But people give off electromagnetic signatures too, which seem to be linked to ki, that's what a battle aura is after all. If so, I would be able to detect them on a dragon ball radar, with the right modifications."

The young fox shrugged. "I did some experiments, and it worked. It's not perfect, it's like detecting the power output of a light connected to a battery, rather than the battery itself, but all things being equal, it gives you a good idea of the normal power output of the battery. By focussing my ki to start flying, I could put my signal up to over 30, and using those meditation techniques Namu taught us I brought it down to around 3, with the average ki output of a regular human being one."

"I'll fix your radar and goggles to do it when we camp tonight. It's just a matter of loading the extra programming. I figured it could come in useful when we're facing Tao Pai Pai and General Blue to get some idea of how tough they are. I might be able to differentiate between individuals or different races too, the frequency spectra tend to group, but that's something I'll have to work on later.

"The big thing is, I'm now certain that the dragon balls were created by a massively powerful martial artist using some incredibly advanced ki technique, they're giant ki batteries and the electromagnetic radiation they give off is due to the residual ki leakage. Maybe their ground state was the rock they turn into when the wish is made, and it takes a year for them to recharge with enough ki to return to normal. Which implies that whoever made them is still around, since he has to be the ultimate source of the power."

Goku's eyes widened. "Woah! I wonder if he spars with anyone, or trains people!"

"You would!" Tails grinned. They'd reached the entrance of the junkyard. "Here we are! Don't worry, they know our identities, but they're keeping the secret."

Lee Kei was near the main court yard, and so were a number of the workers. They knew that this was the big unveiling, and while Lee Kei had seen it before, it was still going to be most people's first view of Tails' invention. He went over to the container he'd been using, and pushed up the roller style door on the end. The lights weren't on inside, but a dark shape could be seen in the shadows.

Tails, who'd released his second tail, pulled out the pocket computer, and input a sequence. A set of four lights flashed on, bracketing the dark shape, and there was the rising hum of an active ground effect hover-system. The shape moved forward, out of the dark container, and into the light.

The vessel was a slender torpedo shape, around four metres long, the main hull painted a sky blue, with a jaunty logo of twin red and white fox tails on each flank. The nose section was a shiny metal screw, and just behind it were the streamlined housings for the high beams that they'd first seen. Two more were placed towards the underside, and appeared to face down and forwards. Nestled between the middle and lower pairs of lights were twin pectoral dive planes

The main hull was surmounted by a pair of in line bubble cockpits, edged with black and yellow hazard stripes, and underneath them, neat lettering. The first said "Miles 'Tails' Prower", the second "Son Goku". Other, smaller access panels on the hull were also hazard haloed. And underneath were the forward vents of the hover system.

Behind the cockpits, the hull flared out into a wider bulge that contained the main components of the hover system, and all the auxiliary equipment that made it work. Twin tail fins stuck up in a V shape, while a third rudder fin stuck down below. The after hull narrowed down to a tear-drop tail, studded with the ducts of the horizontal thrusters.

"Everyone, I give you, the Hover-submersible Exploration Vessel Sea Fox!" Tails felt justifiably proud of his work, and wanted to give it at least some build-up. He pressed another button, and the ship lowered itself to the ground, the twin pectoral fins folding down to support the nose, and the lower rudder splitting and folding out to do the same for the tail end.

"It carries a crew of two. As a hover craft, it has a range of 100 kilometres, at a speed of up to 150 kilometres per hour, while underwater, it has a calculated top speed of 65 knots, and can run at full speed for up to 50 minutes. It's maximum design depth is 80 metres, more than enough for where we're going, and is designed to launch from a bare beach, fly to a dive site, dive and recover objects on the sea floor, then fly back.

"The drill on the front is actually a reversed marine screw propeller design, directly driven by a powerful induction motor. After all, if an air screw can work in pusher or puller mode, why not a marine one? All the electronic components are inside the stator core of the motor, including sensor and feedback systems that turn it into a single giant magnetic bearing. No need for electrical connections, gearing, or mechanical ball bearings, so it can spin really fast, and without needing moving water tight seals!"

He walked up to it and disengaged the forward hatch, which slid forward a few inches before folding up, unsealing the gasket it rested on. There were no mounting steps, but then Tails didn't really need them. He just did a standing jump and somersault into the cockpit. He pulled out a demand valve breathing mask from the side.

"A variable pressure, helium oxygen re-breather system gives us 3 hours of air at maximum depth, and should minimise or even eliminate the need for decompression stops on our ascent. Although the cockpits are pressurised, even in the event of twin canopy failures, or some need to swim outside, the compartments are waterproof, and the masks will continue to supply breathing gas. And an emergency ascent system means we'll always be able to return to the surface."

He pressed some buttons and the vehicle started up, rising back up to hover mode. Then he held his hands above the cockpit, but the ship moved forward.

"Movement is via foot control, leaving the hands free to handle the lights, cameras and manipulator arms. I accelerate and brake with one foot, and turn with the other..."

The Sea Fox sped forward, then forward facing vents opened up on the main thruster system, slowing it down, and vertical rudder vanes in the exhausts of the horizontal thrusters turned back and forth, redirecting the flow and making the hover-sub weave from side to side.

"Underwater, of course, the thrusters seal up..." The Sea Fox landed, thruster system shutting down, and the rudder vanes swung round to seal the thruster nacelles. "... the foot pedals switch to two axis mode, so I can pitch..." He held up a hand and pivoted it up and down from the horizontal, "... as well as yaw..." The hand pivoted from side to side, "... and the accelerator pedal also allows me to roll..." He tilted his hand back and forth as if his middle finger was an axis. "... so the Sea Fox moves like an aircraft."

He shrugged. "I'd have liked to have added multi-axis station-keeping thrusters, pump jets, to allow me to hold myself in place over a target, but this ship's already stuffed like a goose. I'll just have to head into the current, and use the engine to counter it. It has a full sonar and radar system, and links into my DB radar, so finding things shouldn't be a problem."

He slid his hands into armatures, barely visible over the edge of the cockpit, and two of the larger, hazard stripe circled panels hinged out, allowing a pair of manipulator arms to unfold. "I got these off a robot that was in the Red Ribbon Army capsules, they just needed a bit of work to water-proof and add some optional extras."

Both had hands with four digits, and one had a segmented hose attached under it's arm that disappeared into the main body of the craft, while the fore-arm of the other had a blocky case mounted on it.

"A camera under the body, more robot parts, lets me see what's under me, and the lower head lights cover the area. One arm carries a hose that can act as a water pump to blow away sediment, or suck it up and vent it behind me, while the other..." A thick metal drill-bit extruded from the box. "... is a hammer-drill to remove obstructions."

When Tails had landed the sub, he'd ended up over a short coil of rope, and this proved not to be an accident, as the robot arms reached under the Sea Fox and picked the ends up, tying a simple knot before folding away. The canopy folded back, and tails jumped out, vaulting lightly over the edge to land by his new ship.

"Whoa!" There were general expressions of amazement, and Tiny exclaimed. "And you built all this yourself?"

"Well Mr Lee machined a lot of the parts, and I used as many salvaged components and off-the shelf stuff as possible, but I did design it, and do most of the construction, so I guess so." Tails shrugged. "There were a lot of things I could have done if I'd had the materials and time, but this does the job."

One of the other workers grinned, adding. "I'm surprised it doesn't change into a giant robot, or mount a laser cannon!"

Tails replied. "Like I said, there were a lot of things I wanted to do that I didn't have time and materials for. A laser would be kinda useless underwater anyway, but sound-waves carry well, I considered trying to develop a weapon that used a focussed beam of sound waves the same way, but it required a lot of research, and my power budget is stretched enough as it is. Even with the best streamlining in the world, getting it up to 65 knots takes a lot of power."

"You do know I was kidding... right kid?" The guy asked, a bit incredulous.

"Uh... no?" Tails shook his head, looking surprised. "I'd love to have built it as a transformable servo-armour, but that would have added a lot of weight and complexity, and slowed the ship down in sub mode. Remember, there are likely to be armed Red Ribbon subs in the area, and I want to be able to out-run and out-manoeuver them, rather than fight. That's why there aren't any weapons."

"We're gonna run away?" Goku asked, sounding disappointed. "I could swim out and fight them!"

Tails nodded and replied. "I know you could, but being underwater would really limit your mobility, and they'll have torpedoes, like that thing Lord Pilaf launched at us, but designed to go fast underwater."

Better to fight them on dry land, at their base, where we'll have the advantage.

"The way I see it, they'll have a Fenir class attack sub in the area, which can deploy two Batheos class armed mini-sub, and they may have built more..."

"Huh, how do you know that?" asked Tiny.

"I asked at the library how I'd find out about things that happened in the last few years, and they sent me to the newspaper files. The Red Ribbon Corporation going rogue was big news, and one of the articles mentioned a Fenir class submarine they'd been building for the Navy had gone missing. I managed to find a reference book on submarines, and it gave me the specs for it. That's what I used to set the performance requirements for the Sea Fox."

He got back to his original explanation. "They'll almost certainly spot us, give chase, and I'll drop some homing devices that will lock onto their hull as they pass. I can outrun and out-manoeuver them, and while I don't have weapons, I've got countermeasures and decoys for them. When they give up, they'll return to their base, and after we have the dragon-ball, we can go and get them."

Most people in the vicinity, in fact every one who was an adult, boggled at the idea that anyone would go looking for the Red Ribbon Army, despite Tails' earlier explanation.

"Yeah! Now that's what I'm looking forward to! And this Tao Pai Pai guy, he sounds like he'll be a challenge."

"Tao... Tao Pai Pai!" Lee Kei exclaimed. "When Tails mentioned him, I figured he was just giving an example. You mean he's after you too?"

Tails sighed. "Yeah, the Red Ribbon are supposed to be hiring him to get us, and I'm not sure I can beat him, not in a straight up fight."



Don't worry, whatever happens, he won't find out anything about you guys. And I have a few gadgets to even the odds.

"But really, Goku's going to be the one fighting him, I'll just be support. I'm guessing Goku's almost doubled in power since the Tenka'ichi Budokai. With his tail back, and all the training he did..."

"Tail!" gulped one of the workers, remembering seeing the climax of the tournament on TV. "He's not going to go ape again?"

Goku looked at him confused, and Tails moved behind him, frantically waving at them in a 'shut up now!' way.

"If you're talking about the monster that appears when Goku sees the full moon and has a tail, I built him some goggles that filter out moon light. In fact, I'm going to add an alarm to the built-in calendar clock on the HUD that will remind him to use them when the full moon is about to rise. The first time it appeared, it destroyed his grandfather's house and killed his grandfather."

"Yeah! One of these days I'm gonna find a way to stay awake when that big monkey appears, and then I'm gonna teach it a lesson!" Goku said, his tail lashing behind him.

"It's true, Goku doesn't remember a thing from when it appears. It's a sore subject, so please don't say anything more, please?" Tails pleaded, hoping they'd pick up on the sub-text.

Thankfully, they did, or at least Lee Kei did, and quashed further conversation on that line. "You heard him. Tails has done his best to be straight with us along the line. If he says he's fixed things, I amn't going to argue."

The panda turned and grinned at them. "I figured you'd want to leave incognito-like, so I'll take you in one of the trucks out beyond the city limits where you can take off. And we got you a little going away present."

He indicated a long bed pick-up truck, and Tails released his second tail and hovered up a few feet to see over the edge of the load bed. "Way cool! Full heliox tanks!"

"I figured you were a bit short of the necessary when you started worrying about the cost of the parts. I noticed the type of air tank you salvaged for the sub, and found some more. You'll find the ones in your ship are filled too. It also means no-one's going to connect a fox buying tanks of diving stuff and this underwater treasure hunt of yours."

"Wow... Thanks a lot, I was... kinda." Tails landed, and went over to thank him. "You've been so helpful."

"Like I said before, kid, I still owe you, and this is my contribution to helping you take down the Red Ribbon, and get home. That Mobius must be one heck of a place with people like you in it."

The fox kit actually blushed, and ran his hand through his fringe. "I'm not that great, but I'm still training. Maybe, by the time I get back, I'll be good enough that they'll let me help out." His eyes grew distant. "Gosh, I miss them so much."

"Then the sooner you get going, the better!" Lee Kei opened the door on the pick-up. "They say the longest journey begins with a single step, and in this case, the step is a truck ride. So c'mon!"

Tails capsulised the Sea Fox, and climbed in the truck with Goku, and they set off.

**Authors notes:** Okay, this one got away from me. This update was going to be two chapters, tops, but it grew and grew and grew some more. The two chapters of 'Junkyard Tails' would be considered a filler episode in DB, but I wanted to show the construction of the Sea Fox, and I wanted to have a chance to showcase Tails' abilities and how he could cope solo rather than working alongside Goku.

Three of the chapters were pretty much done by Christmas, though they needed proof reading and some revisions. Then came two live action RP sessions, preparations for Christmas, and creative exhaustion. Most of the last chapter was written in January, but I've not had chance to finish it until now.

Some people may consider Tails shown as overpowered, but on the fighting side he's done as much before now, and on the engineering side... Sonic X, he and Chris's grandfather rebuilt the Tornado in a single night. I think 5 days was actually fairly easy going.

The Sea Fox is based on the canon vehicle from the game 'Tails Adventures', and also appeared in the Archie comic series 'warpsonic(dot)tripod(dot)'. I extended it for a two-seater version, and designed in some plot-points.

If my description didn't give you a clear image, take this... 'info(dot)sonicretro(dot)org/images/9/90/Tails\_and\_sea\_', and stretch it a bit, adding in stuff from a Dragon Ball Red Ribbon Army hover vehicle. 'dragonball(dot)wikia(dot)com/wiki/Hovercar'

And yes, Tails has deduced the existence of Kami Sama, and a version of the Sai-jin scouter from his dragon ball experiments. He's more of an engineer than a scientist or theorist, but this was an empirical discovery, the sort an engineer might make, when combined with an inspiration.

I always felt that since it could be fooled by adjusting your ki output, Scouters couldn't detect ki directly... well I covered that in story. I don't think anything in canon contradicts my explanation. So why couldn't you detect dragon balls directly in Z with a scouter? No-one ever thought to make the adjustments to include the right wave pattern. I'm sure one of Freiza's tame scientists could have done it in minutes if they been allowed access to the balls.

Also notice that his education has been lopsided. Tails has large holes in his social and cultural knowledge, and I hope that came

through too. A few months of part time schooling by Master Roshi wouldn't have made up for it, even for someone as smart as Tails.

# Tails of Blue Water Part 1

## Chapter 20 - Tails of Blue Water Part 1

Once again the two friends were cruising side by side over the ocean. Tails was in his favourite jumpsuit, cruising along in deuce juice mode, twin tails thrust out behind him and leaving a faint golden twin contrail. Meanwhile Goku flew beside him on Kinto'un, wearing his regular gi and a happy-go-lucky expression.

They'd started out from their launch point on tail-copter mode, side by side, so Goku could show off his new skill. But although he was stronger, he didn't have Tails' weeks of endurance training flying back and forth between Namu's village and West City So they'd reverted to their regular modes of flight.

They were heading due south and getting close to the area where the dragon-ball signal was coming from. They'd been talking about their experiences over the last week (the communications gear in their goggles made it easy) when there was a beeping sound from one of Tails' pockets.

"Huh? Oh well, I figured as much." Tails exclaimed, and flew right next to Goku. "Catch!"

He flung a Capsule across to the sai-jin, who caught it automatically. "When I say 'Go!' pop the capsule and fling it off the way we've been going, then dive for the sea surface as fast as you can, and I mean after-image fast. Hug the waves!"

"Okay, but why?" Goku asked, looking at the Capsule.

"That beeping is coming from that radio I tricked out at Muscle Tower. Someone had a radar on us. Since there aren't any airports or other places that might be using it out here, logic suggests it's the Red Ribbon Army."

"Radar?" Goku asked. "Like the Dragon-ball radar, so they know where we are?"

"Exactly. However, if I'm right, they may do something more than come look for us themselves..." The steady blipping from the device turned into a stridulation.

Tails scanned the horizon. "Looks like I was right... There! Okay, wait for it... Now!"

He popped the Capsule as he flung it, and a weighted dummy made of various pillows and junk that looked a lot like a two tailed fox was hurled along the original flight path. Tails plunged down to the sea, coming to a hovering stop with his twin tails underneath him, blowing up spray from the waves below.

Goku was there beside him, but another dummy, a spiky haired kid on a fluffy cotton cloud, was flying away. He was looking up at it and said, "So why did we..."

Two jet-trails flew in from the side, and the two distant dots vanished in explosions. Tails was still scanning his surroundings, using the electro-binocular setting on his goggles, and paying particular attention to an area off to one side where the two trails had risen from.

"It's okay, I think we fooled them. Those were radar-guided surface to air missiles. Bigger, faster, nastier versions of that rocket Pilaf threw at us. You might be able to take a hit from one, but I don't think I could. However, they must think they got us. No more launches."

"I get it, the dummies were decoys! Like the fake image you leave behind in a double shadow technique. But why couldn't we just do that?"

"Radar doesn't work that way. Those things had to have something real to home in on. It's why I waited until they'd gone to terminal guidance. There's only so much smarts you can put in a missile."

They may have detected us separating from the dummies, but if something is going in the same direction as it was before, and something else is on a different course, you pick the one that's going the way you expect."

"Couldn't they have seen it wasn't us? With one of those screen things like Pilaf had?"

Tails was surprised that Goku would think of that, but reminded himself again that Goku was not stupid, just uninterested in how things worked. When it came to fighting and tactics, he was anything but.

"Actually, I'm hoping they did. The only aspect seeking SAM they have in their inventory is the Red Ribbon Technologies Archer. I found a book in the library. None of the stuff is used by the regular army any more, so the specs are freely available. Comes in a six shot rack, Capsule deployable launcher, with primary radar targeting from the launcher system and terminal guidance on-board, and it does have an on-board camera."

"Huh?" Goku looked puzzled.

Tails realised he'd over-explained again. "Yes they could see a picture, but the Tails doll had a jammer, a machine that stops radio working. Not powerful enough to futz up the radar guide beam, but quite enough to hash a TV signal. I timed it so the cameras on those things got just close enough to see a rough outline before they lost signal."

"So they think they got us? That's neat!"

"I just figured that given how badly they fared face to face, they'd want to kill us from as far away as possible." Tails blushed. "The rest was obvious."

He looked over at the horizon where the fading smoke trails came from. "The question is do we attack their base while we have the

element of surprise, or do we go after the dragon-ball... I think we go after the base first. If the sub is there, we can take out their whole operation at once, and search for the ball at our leisure."

Goku grinned and cracked his knuckles. "Let's go! I'm always ready for a good fight!"

Tails turned over in mid-air to conventional tail-copter mode, and used the electro-binocular mode again. "If we circle, we can avoid anyone they send looking for us, and maintain the surprise. Follow me!"

He zipped off, and Goku followed him on Kinto-un.

"Haha! They're dead!" The speaker was an obese man with a moustache. However, this one's hair was not red, but dark, and so was his name, Captain Dark, though the soldiers of Blue company called him Captain Dork when they were sure he wasn't in ear-shot. "Commander Red will make me a major, no a general for this!"

He held up the photo print of the last image the cameras on the missiles had gotten. If you squinted, you could just make out two dark blotches that had the outline of a flying fox and human riding a cloud.

"Get me Commander Red!"

He picked up a red phone on the central desk in the command centre. "Sir, Captain Dark reporting from Blue Sea Base. The two priority one targets have been eliminated."

He smirked as he listened. "No sir, General Blue is out on the Crimson Tide, hunting the dragon-ball. I was in charge of the base at the time. Oh yes sir, I have visual confirmation. I lost signal just before impact, our techs think one of them had some sort of counter-measures device, but it was no match for the Archers!"

He frowned at the next speech. "Balls, sir?"



His started to sweat at the response. "No sir, we haven't recovered the dragon balls they were carrying. We didn't... Shielded container? No sir, I mean yes sir! I'll immediately send out a search party to recover it!"

He turned to his staff. "De-capsulise a transport sea-plane and load it with every boat and set of scuba gear we have! Now, you incompetent dolts!"

He stormed out, leaving a staff behind him who, to a man, smirked at his distress. One of them offered, "Two to one General Blue has him shot once he finds out how he mucked this one up."

There were no takers but a lot of nasty chuckles as they moved to obey.

As they swept round, Tails examined the island as they passed with the electro-binocular function of his goggles. "Darn, I can't get a decent view of their base... though that should mean no-one can see us either... I need to sit down for a minute."

He flew over to land on Kinto'un, and pulled out a Capsule and his pocket computer, which had been heavily modified. "Let's see if this works."

He popped the capsule, which deployed a matt black prolate spheroid, what an American would have called an American football shape. He pulled off a widget that was taped to it with insulation tape, and plugged the device into a port on the pocket computer.

Then he drew his arm back, and hurled the football in a high arc over the island with a force that would have made any coach drool. Goku just looked confused at the fox, but Tails just grinned and pressed an icon on the screen on his computer. "I figured we might need something like this, so I put it together during odd minutes while I was waiting for the mouldings to cool."

A window popped up on the screen showing the legend 'Link established', and Tails started tapping buttons in earnest. High above the island, a hatch on the side of the ball opened, and a ribbon streamed out, pulling a four foot wide, white para-sail after it. The ball slowed to a stop in mid-air, and started to drift down.

However, the changes continued. The ends of the ball split away, extending on rods and leaving ring-shaped gaps. The 'nose' gap revealed a circle of lenses and gadgetry that could rotate on the shaft, while the rear one extruded ducts that started to suck in air with an almost noiseless whine of electric impellers. Said air was expelled with some force from a nacelle that opened in the rear tip of the ball.

The device proceeded to steer itself into a wide circle of the island by deft manipulation of the tips of the para-sail, and it's lenses spun to face down, and focus on the greenery below. Back on Kinto'un, Tails tapped the side of his goggles and nodded approvingly.

"Whatcha doing?" Goku was still puzzled by his friend's actions.

"Pull down your goggles and tap the control button twice, and you'll see!"

When the young sai-jin did as he was told, an image formed in front of one of his eyes, as if he was looking down from a great height on a jungle covered island.

"Cool, you can do that camera thing too!"

"Uh huh! It's amazing what you can find just lying around in a junk-yard. Take a ball, some black paint and some computer fans. Add some left-over electronics from my submarine test rigs, and a spare goggles comms circuit, and you have a spy-eye. Nearly undetectable by radar, and looks like some sort of seagull from a distance unless you examine it with binoculars."

He used his computer to zoom in the image, as Kinto'un continued to zoom around the far side of the island. The most obvious thing was a cluster of domes and smaller objects on the beach, but there were glimpses of other structures hidden in the heavy jungle cover.

"Look, there on the beach must be their command post, and that structure next to it has to be their armoury, and possibly a workshop if those jet-copters lined up on shore are anything to go by." He noticed some frantic activity. "Hey, I wonder..."

Then he chuckled and zoomed in even further, the ring of cameras rotating to give him one with a higher magnification. "Looks like someone just remembered I was carrying dragon-balls when they shot me down. Look, scuba-gear, and they just popped a big plane. Let's see what infra-red shows..."

The image changed again. "See those lines of heat moving to the shore? Men, which means those must be the barracks blocks. That big splash of heat has to be the SAM launcher, and that the power plant. I don't see any sign of fixed positions or fox-holes..."

"Maybe they don't have any foxes with them." Goku responded.

Tails decided to roll with it. "Well you have one here, and he's telling you there's nothing to stop us just flying in at ground level and smashing things, as far as I can see."

"Yeah! My kind of plan!" Goku cheered.

"We're almost around the opposite side..." He zoomed out and pointed to a fast moving dot. "There, that's us! I just want to make sure they don't tell anybody..."

He focussed on his computer again, and the viewpoint of the device suddenly expanded as he collapsed the canopy by pulling in the control lines, and the device plummeted towards the island. The canopy opened just before it hit the crowns of the jungle trees, and slowed it down, out of sight of the encampment.

The ball dropped relatively gently to the ground, and withdrew the canopy and it's impellers fully before rolling forward on it's centre section. It drove through the undergrowth, camera end still open, and allowing Tails to guide it up behind the Command Centre with it's radar and communications antennae.

As it bumped up against the curved wall, the ring of impellers was extruded again, this time with sucker cups on their ends, and a second row was extended from the camera gap. With another quiet whirr the cups clamped themselves to the surface of the dome, and the versatile robot started to roll up the wall.

Tails guided it up to the peak where the antenna mast was, and manoeuvred it in front of an access panel. A jointed arm extruded with a revolver magazine arrangement on the end, lined itself up with a screw and unfolded a matching screwdriver on a curved armature which lined it up with the centre line of the revolver. It engaged the screw and the whole thing spun round to unscrew it.

A few seconds work and the panel fell off with a quiet clank. Another implement, a universal adaptor replaced the screwdriver and plugged itself into the matching test plug on the revealed test panel. On Tails' computer, a second window opened up, a 'negotiating with host' message quickly replaced with an on-screen control panel for the system.

Tails had spent several hours with the computer systems at Muscle Tower, so it took only a moment's work to fix things on this almost identical system so that the only signals he approved of would be transmitted.

He put his device away with an approving nod, only to stop Goku before he dashed off into the jungle they were now hovering by. "Whoa!"

"But Tails!" Goku sounded like the fox-kit had just eaten the last char-sui bun. "You said we could just fly in and smash them!"

"And we will, but Auntie Sally always said, if something looks too good to be true, it probably is. I figure we split up to hit them as fast and as hard as possible to give them no time to pull any nasty surprises. You go after the barracks and mess area, try to leave one building intact so we have somewhere to lock the goons up after we catch them. Fly in in case they planted mines to cover their backs."

"Mines?" the young sai-jin asked.

"Just trust me on this. I'll take the shore-line, cut off their access to the armoury, disable their deployed vehicles, then come round and take them down. We'll be in continuous contact, so if you need help, just call. If the sub returns, I'll make sure it never submerges or moves again, and if General Blue or Tao-Pai-Pai appears we join up and take him together."

"Aw! I can take him!" Goku exclaimed.

"And I'll let you, but they're supposed to be Tenka'ichi Budo'kai level fighters, so I'd rather be there and not be needed, than the other way round. Okay?"

"Okay... Let's go!" Goku bounded off Kinto'un and into the tree-line.

Tails took off on his own path, zipping through the trees like a rebel commando on a speeder-bike. He circled the main camp, where it sounded like Goku was already taking care of business, and burst out of the trees by the workshop dome on the beach. He overflew it and headed for the nearest vehicle, a jet-patroller.

He'd dismantled enough of them when building the Sea Fox to know exactly where to hit them, so he landed behind the helicopter-style bubble canopy, and punched down through the fairing behind it, pulling out a small but vital component that would take an hour to replace and calibrate. Then he picked the machine up like a cargo helicopter, and flung it to crash against the door of the workshop, blocking it quite thoroughly.

He duplicated the feat for the door of the Command centre, just as the Red Ribbon goons working on the beach started to realise something was wrong. He kept one eye on them as he flew down the row of vehicles disabling each with a lightning fast strike to some key component. He could have just smashed straight through them with a Tailspin Attack and a whole load of explosions, but his scavengers instinct didn't want to wreck them any more than he needed to.

The last vehicle he stopped was a large twin engined sea-plane that tried to get away from the beach. Dropping on the engine cowlings and ripping out a few strategic magnetos made sure it would be going any further. His keen ears heard the clicking of rifles being taken off safety, and he sprung up off the second engine just before several streams of bullets passed through the space he'd just occupied.

There were over a dozen forage capped Red Ribbon Army soldiers on the beach, but only about half of them had been armed, and their guns had been slung as they helped load the sea-plane. There was also Captain Dark, frothing with indignation as he waved a heavy pistol about.

"Kill him! Kill that flying freak!"

Any real army soldier would have sneered at their efforts. They seemed to have never heard of fire discipline, preferring to make up for indifferent aiming skills by hosing the entire area Tails was in with bullets. However, against a target that could move and evade as fast as Tails, all they did was use up their magazines.

Not that he was worried about them hitting him, he'd identified the rifles by their sound, and they wouldn't do more than bruise him if they did hit. Still, it was good training so Tails weaved through the air between the streams for the handful of seconds before their magazines ran dry. Then he vectored in and swept across the line of thugs, ripping the rifles out of their hands.

He came to a stop beyond the group of soldiers, holding the rifles in both arms like a stack of firewood. He flexed his arms and broke them across his chest, letting the wrecked guns drop to the floor.

"Cowards! Idiots!" Captain Dark had stopped waving his pistol around and aimed it at the small fox in a marksman's two handed grip. "If you won't kill him, I'll do it myself!"

Tails just stood there. "Actually, you won't. Surrender..."

Captain Dark fired and one gloved hand was suddenly there, the sound of whip-crack followed by a ricochet as it deflected the bullet.

"... and we'll lock you up..."

Tails took a step forward as he spoke. Bang! His hand moved again, too fast to see. Whip-crack! Ricochet!

"... and leave you for the..."

Step. Bang! Whip-crack! Ricochet!

"... regular army."

Step. Bang! Whip-crack! Silence. Tails now held a deformed bullet between his fingers. Captain Dark gaped. "No! No-one can catch a bullet!"

Tails grinned as he dodged another bullet. "Wrong! When you've had..."

Bang! Bang! He just left himself open and let the bullets deflect off his ki enhanced chest.

"... a super-powered martial artist pelt you with stones..." Bang. Bang. Click.

"... at super-sonic velocities, you learn how." He flicked the bullet at Captain Dark at about half the speed, but with pinpoint accuracy,

and the gun he was frantically trying to reload dropped from nerveless fingers as the bullet struck the back of his hand, leaving it bruised and bleeding.

"A Red Ribbon 6.5 mm semi-automatic. Eight round magazine, muzzle velocity 720 metres per second. If you'd had an anti-tank rocket, or a crew served heavy machine gun, I'd have dodged in earnest." Tails suddenly blurred and was right in front of the Red Ribbon captain.

"How?" Dark staggered back, face shocked. "I shot you down! I shot you both down!"

"Once again, the observable data doesn't seem to bear out your hypothesis. Goku should just about have finished taking down the rest of your men. Now either surrender and be locked up, or be knocked out and locked up. Unless anyone wants to go hand to hand..." He kicked the pistol up into his hand, and quite visibly crushed it. Oddly enough, none of the common soldiers who'd been standing back and watching the face-off took him up on his offer.

That pretty much ended all resistance from that detachment of the RRA. The remaining men in the control centre were convinced to come out quietly by Tails' and Goku's combined efforts. Goku's blasting away the door and wrecked jet patroller covering it with a low power Kamehameha may have encouraged their meekness.

As they were being locked into the two barracks, one of them whimpered, "But if General Blue comes back and finds us like this, he'll have us all shot, or worse!"

Tails asked. "Is he out with the sub, searching for the dragon ball?"

"Don't tell him!" Captain Dark had enough puff left to exclaim.

"I can just check the logs in the command centre, so it doesn't matter." Tails sighed. "Anyway, he's going to have far bigger



problems than coming back here. He doesn't even know what's happened!"

"I... sort of sent a distress signal when you started to attack..." One weedy and be-spectacled guy stuttered, and got not a few glares and threatening looks from his own colleagues.

The little fox grinned. "I already had your communications intercepted before we attacked. No-one heard anything. The only signal that's going out is one to the Regular Army to come and get you."

"But how!" The weedy guy looked shocked. "The only time you were near the command centre, you were throwing things at it?"

Tails held up his pocket computer, showing the control panel. "I sent in a remote and hacked into your main transmitter at the AE-35 access panel. I got a good look at your systems when we took down Muscle Tower. Cap OS 7.5? Really? And a bootleg version at that?"

The other rolled his eyes. "I know, I've put in memos about improvements, but it's all about bigger guns, and automated weaponry. No-one seems interested in infra-structure upgrades."

"All the better for me!" Tails replied. "I grew up pitting myself against self adapting heuristic machine intelligences. Compared to that, your gear is one step above a cleft stick. A short step."

One of the other soldiers looked unimpressed, possibly because any computer more complex than a hand-held game was a complete mystery to him. "That computer weenie stuff won't help you against the sub."

"I researched your Fenir class sub. I'm well aware of what it can do." Tails pulled out a capsule and popped it to reveal the Sea Fox. "This is my answer."

"It's not very big, is it?"

"Neither are we." the fox replied. "Who's been winning so far? Besides, I'm not going to out fight them, I'm going to out-think them. As far as I can tell, we've been winning that battle too.

"Go quietly with the regular army, serve your time, become upstanding citizens, and we won't have any further problems, and neither will you. Commander Red has the last two dragon balls at your main base, which means we're going to have to take it down. The Red Ribbon Army is finished, and good riddance."

They finished locking up the bad guys and Tails stopped by the SAM launcher to make sure it was thoroughly disabled. He also locked out changes on the base communications system, left a message for the regular army and recovered his spy ball.

"Those guys didn't really put up much of a fight." Goku complained as they went back towards the Sea Fox.

Tails looked apologetic. "Sorry, I know you were looking forward to one. But I'm betting we'll face General Blue before this is over, maybe even Tao Pai Pai when Commander Red figures out this place has been taken out. If half of what we've picked up is true, even you're going to have your hands full with those guys."

He hopped up into the Sea Fox and started doing a systems check.

Goku landed in the seat behind him. "I hope so! I know we've got to stop the Red Ribbon Army, but I want a tougher fight. Hey. Aren't we near Master Roshi's place?"

Tails buckled up. "Pretty close, we could go see him after we get this dragon ball. Put on your seat belt."

"Yeah!" Goku grinned. "If the old timer isn't in the mood for a fight, Kurilin should be!"

"Okay, first we go get the dragon ball, then we go to the Turtle House!" Tails flicked switches on his control panel, and the vehicle

went into hover mode, rising up on it's under-jets. "Let's go see what we can see under the sea!"

They flew down to the beach and out over the water, descending just enough to use the downward tail fin as a rudder. A rooster-tail of water flared up behind them as they headed off towards the signal of the next dragon ball, and their next adventure.

**Authors Note:** This is for all those patient people who didn't think I'd ever get going on this again. The really fun stuff, which maps more closely to the manga, is on it's way. While I'm publishing this one to show I am working on it, I intend to do the whole sub-plot, which should take another two chapters, before I move on to Cerinia Chronicles.

# Tails of Blue Water Part 2

## Chapter 21 - Tails of Blue Water Part 2

The Sea Fox was nearing the location of the next dragon ball, and Tails was examining his displays. "That's odd..."

"What's up?" Goku asked. While his cockpit was separate from Tails', there was a speaker system between them.

"The phase harmonics in the dragon ball signal... I think it's covered by more than water. Uh... let's see... put the display mode to vertical... widen the side-band sensitivity... reformat the signal parameters... Aha!"

There was a small screen in Goku's cockpit, which suddenly lit up, showing a picture of the dragon ball surrounded by squiggles.

"You see?" Tails clearly understood it, "The dragon ball isn't just sitting on the sea floor, it's in an underground cave! We could have circled the place until our air ran out and never seen it."

Goku looked non-plussed. To him it still looked like a random set of squiggles. "And where are the Red Ribbon guys? I really want to fight this General Blue!"

"I won't know until I submerge. They're almost certainly in the area, and they'll know where we are. I chose fast and manoeuvrable over quiet when I built the Sea Fox. Of course, a Fenir isn't designed to be particularly quiet either."

He considered the display. "There must be a way into the cave system, but we'll need time to find it, and they'll be after us as soon as we go underwater. However, I have a few tricks that should buy us the time, if we're lucky. Let's just hope the cavern system is wide enough for the Sea Fox, if not you might be taking a swim while I distract them. Ready?"

From the outside, the surface effect vehicle appeared to nose up, lifted into a low arc by a boost from its thrusters. As it reached its peak, the vents on its underside and tear-drop stern sealed themselves up. The big drill-like screw on the nose started to spin up, then the Sea Fox plunged down into the sea in a plume of spray, drilling downwards at a better than forty five degree angle. In seconds, it had disappeared completely.

On-board the Red Ribbon Army attack submarine Crimson Tide, the sonar operator, a narrow muzzled dog, looked up from his sonar display.

"Sir, we have an object entering the water approximately three kilometres away, on a bearing of one seven zero."

"What?" The man who responded could have been a poster boy for the SS. Unlike the ratings, who wore forage caps and jumpsuits, or the officers, who were in naval uniform with billed caps, he wore khaki drill and jodhpurs, and pillbox cap. He was tall, blond haired, well muscled and handsome enough to be almost pretty. However there was nothing pretty about his expression. "Has Blue Base shot down something?"

"No, General Blue, it's under power and moving. It's making a a lot of engine noise too... and it's fast!"

"Towards us?" The General strode over to stand behind the operator. The dog started panting, since he couldn't sweat, but bent closer to his screen.

"I'm still confirming a course... yes, not directly at us, but in our direction."

"Towards the area where the dragon ball is, in other words." General Blue turned on his heel. "Have we heard anything from Blue Base?"

Another systems operator, human this time, looked up from his panel, one earphone of a set held against his head. "No sir, nothing

on standard frequencies, nothing on ULF."

"That moron Dark!" General Blue growled. He turned to a hippopotamus who was wearing a naval captain's uniform. "He's probably so busy grooming his moustache he hasn't even noticed. Remind me to have him executed, and the on watch crew as well when we return. I've wanted an excuse to do that for weeks."

"N... Noting it in the log sir." The submarine captain replied, nodding to the Chief of Boat, a black bearded human, who actually wrote it up. "Reason - Gross dereliction of duty."

"Yes, but mostly because of how fat he is!" The General shuddered. "All that flab, he's a disgrace to the uniform! And that horrible little moustache. Bleah! But gross dereliction of duty will do nicely as an excuse. Obviously no man could be as handsome, or as well groomed as myself, but you'd think he could at least make \_some\_ effort."

The captain sweat-dropped nervously, because as a hippo he was hardly a slender reed himself. He covered it by asking, "Orders sir? Shall we engage?"

"No! If they are a part of this group with the fox and the child they have a better dragon ball radar than our own. Colonel Yellow reported that much. Pursue them, and let them lead us to it's location. But load all tubes, and set the torpedoes for proximity detonation. If they try to evade, I want them unconscious and the ship disabled, not destroyed. I want to capture it, and the radar and any balls they already have."

"Could it be those two children, sir?" the captain asked.

"Hmph!" General Blue snorted. "From what little we know, they've never used vehicles before, though they do have access to advanced technology, possibly from their contact at Capsule Corps. If they're on that sub, they'll be passengers."

He sneered. "I've reviewed the footage from the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, they may have some amusing little tricks, but they still need to breathe. Flooding their vehicle will put them out of action. And if they do survive, I will be more than capable of dealing with them myself."

The Chief of Boat called out. "Forward torpedo room reports tubes one through four loaded and flooded. Warheads set to 20 metres proximity detonation."

The captain turned to the helmsman. "Come to an intercept bearing and pursue! Twenty degrees down angle on the diving planes! Full power to the engine!"

As they levelled out above the sea floor, Tails was examining his instruments and testing his controls. The Sea Fox didn't plod through water like most mini-sub, it glided like an aeroplane, rolling as it changed direction, and swooping and soaring as Tails followed a nape of the earth course along the contours of the sea bed. He hadn't even pushed it to top speed yet.

Speed and manoeuvrability was good, the pressurisation system was optimal, and sonar and dragon-ball radar were working well. There was more turbulence than he'd expected across his bubble canopy from the drill propeller, but his forward view was still clear. It seemed everything was good to go...

"Man, I'm hungry!" He heard over the internal comm.

He should have know better than to even think that, Tails thought to himself. "Didn't you have breakfast?"

"Uh uh! Not much anyway. I was looking forward to getting back. Hey, I've still got some of those Senzu beans!"

"Whoa! Save those for if we get hurt!" While Goku's comment was a nice complement, the situation was awkward. He should have made sure the sai-jin had topped up before they set off from Blue base, heck, there had been an entire base worth of supplies if he'd wanted.

"I've got half a Capsule crate of those MREs left, I'll get them out as soon as we surface..."

His sonar had started picking up something else, and his headset, designed to cancel out the noise of their own engine, was picking up a different sound. "Looks like those Red Ribbon goons have come to play! Do they really think I'd just lead them to the dragon-ball?"

His current course would take him past the position of the dragon-ball, but near enough that he should be able to circle and see if he could find an entrance to the cave system. He considered some angles and velocities, and flipped a switch. A group of a dozen Capsules were released from a hatch on the underside, and floated down to the sea-bed.

He let the bigger sub close on him, until they were at the right position. Then he cranked his speed up to maximum, dived closer to the seabed and started weaving from side to side. "Okay, time to juice and jam! Let's see how eager you are to get us..."

True to expectations, as soon as he started to manoeuvre, the sub behind him launched a spread of four torpedoes. "Wow! I guess they want us really badly!"

He watched the four torpedo tracks close on his sonar, and waited. Then at the last moment, he pressed flipped another switch. Four more Capsules were released, but these almost immediately popped, releasing wrecked hulks of Red Ribbon vehicles, passenger compartments caulked and holding enough air to make them neutrally buoyant.

That wasn't all they held, as salvaged tape decks started playing through battered loud speakers in the air-filled compartments. The noise would hardly make the top ten, but it was sweet music to the torpedoes, as it matched the engine noise of the Sea Fox. Screened by the decoys, Tails powered straight ahead towards the lip of an undersea canyon where his reconfigured radar suggested there might be an entrance to the undersea caves.



There was a trio of closely spaced explosions as three of the four torpedoes went home against the decoys. The shock wave could be felt even at the distance the Sea Fox was at, though it did nothing more than shake them. But the first one simply scraped the edge of one of the decoys, and kept on coming.

"Uh oh!" Tails spotted the leaker on his sonar. "One got through, they must have set the arming time incorrectly! Time for plan B!"

He calculated times and distances, remembering the specs listed for the Fenir's torpedoes, and that the explosions had come before the expected time of impact. They must have been proximity fused, and the prematurity of the explosions gave a good estimate of the range.

He started pressing controls, flooding the forward under-jet compartments and ballast tanks. The Sea Fox became nose heavy, even as the vulpine pilot kept it's nose up with upward angled bow planes.

The nose cone screw propeller sped up as he threw the batteries for the surface jet-mode system in series with the primary battery, and the little sub leapt forward. This emergency boost would damage the motor if used for more than a few moments, but that torpedo would damage everything else if it got too near them.

They passed out over the edge of the canyon a few seconds before the torpedo caught up with them, and Tails immediately threw the mini-sub into a barrel roll. Most submarines couldn't do a barrel roll, but then most submarines weren't hydro-dynamic aqua-planes and doing speeds more appropriate to a light aircraft.

The small vessel swung to the side, looping up and over the torpedo as it whistled past, just evading the edge of it's proximity fuse's range. The homing torpedo tried to correct, but although it was faster than the Sea Fox, even under additional power, it was no-where near as manoeuvrable. After all, it's regular targets couldn't dodge that fast.

Tails continued the loop and came out of it nose down, powering into the depths of the canyon. He rotated the sub so their cockpits looked in the direction the torpedo had gone, and looking out, he could see it beginning a wide turn. As it reached half way, he cut the engines completely, the mini-sub slowing down to sink under it's own weight into the depths.

The torpedo continued looping back, but rather than start to turn down, it carried straight back over top of the canyon, back towards the sound of a still active decoy. A few seconds later there was an explosion, and Tails started to level out the Sea Fox and blow the forward tanks with a sigh of relief.

His dragon-ball radar was now showing a clear signal from a cave on the opposite wall, and he spun up the screw on low power, moving towards it.

"Woo hoo! Let's do that again!" yelled Goku.

"Let's not." Tails shook his head with a sigh of relief. At least they wouldn't be bothered by the Crimson Tide for the immediate future, they would shortly have their own problems to worry about.

"The target sub... It's disappeared!" The sonar operator exclaimed.

"What? I heard the explosions! If it's been destroyed, I'll have the entire torpedo crew executed!" General Blue came over to the system operator's console. "Show me the forward view!"

A forward facing camera with light intensification showed the view ahead. One of the decoys was still floating there, a stripped down Red Ribbon jet patroller, sealed off cockpit leaking air from previous shocks and with a big smiley face, tongue sticking out and one eyelid pulled down, painted on the canopy.

A few seconds later, the returning torpedo reach the correct proximity, and blew up, the shock wave knocking the decoy aside,

and rupturing the weakened seals. It flooded and sank, fake engine noise stopping.

"These impudent pests dare to give me the red eye!" yelled the General. "Find them! Prepare the mini-subbs! Assemble a squad! Do some..."

There was a violent series of explosions, and the whole boat shuddered. Lighting flickered and was replaced by red emergency lights, and the submarine slowed to a stop.

General Blue hauled himself up by the back of the chair he'd grabbed onto when the boat rocked, leaving an imprint in the metal. "What... happened!"

Despite the ringing in his ears, he could hear the Chief of Boat as he lowered his intercom headset. "Engine room reports the propulsion turbine... It's wrecked, sir!"

The Crimson Tide, rather than a regular screw propeller, had a ducted turbine, similar in appearance to a jet engine nacelle. It sat in a conformal housing on the underside of the submarine, a thick grill across the intake to prevent foreign objects hitting the turbine blades.

Before General Blue could ask for further details, his questions were answered, after a fashion.

"Hello bad guys of the Red Ribbon Army! This is Tails the Fox, and that explosion you just heard was your engine going blooey!" The voice was everywhere, and quite loud.

"And this sound is coming from the speaker units that have magnetically clamped to your hull. They're designed to transmit this recording through the metal of the hull so no-one misses anything."

"How did he manage to sneak up and attack us?" yelled Blue. He turned to the sonar operator, pointing a finger. "Have that man arrested and shot for incompetence!"

"You're probably wondering how I managed to attack you. Well I didn't. I simply lured you into following me, close to the sea floor, and left some gifts behind. Capsules, with an attached CCD camera element, waterproofed in a block of plastic with a built-in bulls-eye lens, and designed to float pointing upwards."

"The processor circuit had your hull shape programmed in, and when a shadow that matched it showed against the light from the surface, they activated. The first few were bazooka rounds from your own Outpost Silver. I had to rebuild the propulsion system with a mixture of baking soda and a few other common chemicals to get a rocket that worked underwater, but it was enough. It's amazing just what you can do with some duct tape.

"From the diameter of the hull and position on it's CCD the processor could figure out your relative position and range, and launched them so they'd hit just ahead of your intake nacelle. The water flow did the rest. The first couple took out the grill, and the rest mangled your turbine. I estimated four rounds would have a 93% change of completely disabling you, so I dedicated six. I knew they couldn't breach your primary hull."

The foxes voice continued. "The rest were just speakers, lofted by self inflating balloons. The same magnets that clamped them to your hull are also the drive coils of the speaker array. I'd explain about modulating the magnetic flux that holds them there to turn your entire boat into one big resonating chamber, but that would be showing off. Neat, isn't it? They're to convince you to surface, as they'll only shut off when the pressure switch inside is in less than 10 metres of water.

"I couldn't fix your mini-sub, not with the equipment I had available, so you might still be trouble. But while you've been listening to this message, we've been looking for the dragon-ball, and have by now probably found it. All in all, your general must be feeling pretty blue." The sentence ended with a chuckle.

"Which reminds me, Goku really wants to have a chance to fight you, General Baby Blue. So make sure you're nice and visible. I'll sign off, but to keep you company while you drift aimlessly, here's some light music."

The voice was replaced by a polka, played at ear-destroying volume, which segued into a military march, and then a heavy metal number. Tails had been forced to work with whatever left over tapes he could salvage from the junk yard, and it showed.

"WE HAVE TO SURFACE!" yelled the hippo, barely audible over the music.

"WHAT?" yelled back General Blue.

"WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SURFACE!" the submarine captain repeated.

"I CAN'T HEAR YOU! YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO SURFACE!" Blue screamed back, pointing upwards. "BUT I'M TAKING THE MINI-SUBS OUT PERSONALLY! AND WHEN I FIND THAT FOX, I'LL HAVE HIS FUR FOR A RUG!"

"Hopefully, my little message will make General Blue so mad he can't think straight!" Tails grinned as he re-pressurised the flooded compartments, levelling off the miniature submarine. "That was Sonic's trick, getting old Robuttnik so mad he did something stupid or hasty, rather than planning something effective."

They were almost to the cave entrance when the Sea Fox suddenly lurched. There was a massive venting from the rear cockpit as Goku opened his canopy, using the emergency lever Tails had shown him. Tails tried frantically to stabilise it as the sai-jin swam up out of his seat, and darted after a fish almost as big as he was.

He dragged it back just as Tails got the sub levelled out, and sat back down, then started looking for away to close the canopy. Before he could panic and damage something, Tails activated the automatic

closing sequence, and re-pressurised the rear cabin. He glanced over his shoulder. Goku was already biting chunks out of the fish.

"Goku, you could have waited!" the young fox said exasperated.

"Sorry Tails, but I was really hungry, and then I saw this tasty fish..." Goku said between mouthfuls.

"I guess it's my fault for not seeing you got a proper meal beforehand." Tails sighed, as he guided the Sea Fox into the under-sea cave, which turned out to be a long tunnel. He turned on the forward lights came on as they got deeper in, the tunnel narrowing as they got further in. The cave also started to angle up until they surfaced in an underground pool.

Tails looked around in awe as he undid his seatbelt. "Oh wow! An undersea cavern? How does it have air?"

He grabbed the independent breather mask and fitted it over his muzzle, strapping the pressure bottle onto his waist. "Make sure you put your mask on! The air may not be breathable."

"Okay!" Goku put on his own mask, following Tails' instructions, while the young fox equalised the pressure and popped the canopies. Goku jumped to the dry ledge that ran around half of the pool, and led to a natural tunnel going into the rock.

"Goku, it's going to be too dark even for night vision when I shut the Sea Fox down, so just stay where you are." Tails hopped up out of his seat and shut the Sea Fox down, plunging the cavern into darkness.

A few seconds later, a powerful torch came on, held in Tails' hand. He hovered over the Sea Fox, closing the canopies then pressed the button to recapulise it. Plucking the capsule out of the air, he flew down beside Goku and handed him a second torch. "I should have added some sort of automatic illuminator into the design of the goggles. They don't need much light, but they do need some. "

They made their way along the tunnel, until Goku spotted a button on the wall. He pushed it before Tails could say anything, and a line of lighting fixtures lit up overhead. They were linked together by a ceiling cable, fixed into the native rock of the tunnel.

"Hoooo! I pressed it, and it got brighter!"

Tails was looking up in wild surmise. "But why would there be lights down here unless someone had already been here? But who..."

He looked back down, right into the face of a skull, missing its lower jaw.

"Yaaaagh!" Tails yelled as he sprung back, going into a defensive stance as Goku lowered the skull which he was holding up and laughed helplessly at Tails' reaction.

"Hey, that wasn't very funny!" Tails exclaimed with a frown.

"He he, sorry, but you're being so serious all the time." Goku put down the skull.

Tails sighed. "I have to be, while there's a job too. Where did you find that thing anyway?"

"What, this? Over there!" Goku pointed to a full skeleton, picked clean. It wore old clothing, and an old fashioned sub-machine gun and tricorne hat with skull and crossbones laid before it.

Tails shivered. "Skeletons creep me out. Worse than those bodies we had to bury in Karin sanctuary. I know they're just bones, but they look wrong!"

"Hey, I really am sorry." Goku replied, looking abashed.

"It's okay, I need to learn not to fear them either. I can't afford to be weak." Tails shook his head, trying to clear it. "Besides, I know what this place is! Mr Lee Kei mentioned there were pirates around here

once. This must have been their base. No wonder they couldn't be found!"

He started off down the corridor a way, then stopped. "I just thought of something! Here!"

He pulled out another Capsule from his case, and popped it, revealing a mostly empty Red Ribbon Army ration crate. "They're only MREs, but they should make up for breakfast. I'll keep my mask on, if you faint, I can put yours back on right away."

While Goku tore into several packs, Tails popped another Capsule case, and pulled out a device. Flying up to the nearest light fitting, he attached it just inside the wide cone that formed a lampshade. He fiddled with it, and his goggles for a moment, then made an approving noise.

"What's that?" Goku asked rather indistinctly.

"Remote sensor camera. If something passes underneath it, it'll send an image to my goggles and alert me. They may figure out where we went, and send someone after us. But at least it'll just be goons with guns. That I'm not scared of any more."

As Tails put several similar devices in his pockets, and retrieved his capsules, Goku said, "I hope General Blue's with them!"

"After the way I taunted him, count on it." Tails strode forward. "But this way they won't take us by surprise."

They quickly came upon a section of tunnel which changed from bare rock to white plaster. The lights in the ceiling were recessed, and the first section of corridor had small holes in the ceiling and a grid of raised pads on the floor. Goku strode past tails, but was stopped by the young fox's gloved hand on his shoulder.

"There's something not right about this..." He pulled out the flashlight, and reached it out over the first row of pads. Tapping a pad



caused a short spear to spring out of the wall. "A trap! The pirates must have set it up to protect their base. The pads must trigger spears."

Goku looked thoughtful. "So as long as we don't step on those round things, we're okay, right?"

"Yes..." Tails started examining the walls. "There must be a concealed off switch or something like that. Hmm..."

After a few seconds examination, he saw a patch of stone that was slightly a slightly different colour to the rest. He prodded it, and it moved aside, revealing a button. Standing to one side, he pressed it with an outstretched arm.

There was rumble, and a doorway opened in the rock. "Yes! A secret passage way!"

He turned to show Goku, only to see him at the other end of the passage. "How did you get over there?"

"I flew, how else?" yelled the sai-jin, spinning his monkey tail a few times.

"Okay, I guess that works too." Tails grinned. He stepped inside the passage, and closed the door behind him, jamming the hinges. "That should stop anyone following us."

He rejoined Goku, and together they carried on.

Meanwhile, a pair of mini-sub's bearing Red Ribbon logos surfaced in the same pool the Sea Fox had recently been in. They manoeuvred over to the edge of the pool, and two six man squads piled out, with General Blue leading them.

"An underwater cavern. Interesting." The cacophony or mismatched sound was still ringing in his ears. "They thought they could hide

from the Red Ribbon Army? They will soon learn the error of their ways. Ohoho!"

None of the soldiers was going to mention how daft it looked for the General to laugh behind the back of his hand like some society girl, because they didn't want him to revoke their breathing privileges. Instead the leading seaman, a walrus, came up and saluted. "Red Ribbon Army, ready to move out!"

"Excellent!" The General grinned evilly. "They have no-where to go. You shall bear witness, as I cleverly destroy them both myself!" More maniacal laughter followed, causing the assembled soldiers to sweat drop.

# Tails of Blue Water Part 3

## Chapter 22 - Tails of Blue Water Part 3

Goku's excited voice came to Tails as he exited the secret tunnel. "Hey! There's a big old open space here!"

A short distance beyond the trapped tunnel section, it opened out into a far larger chamber, squared off and surfaced with concrete slabs. The centre part of the chamber was a large rectangular pool running it's full length, with concrete docks running along each side. Their tunnel opened out onto end of one of the docks, and tied up alongside it was an old but still sleek and deadly looking submarine, easily the size of the Fenir that had chased them. A much smaller mini-sub floated next to it.

The dockside also had a number of buildings, cranes and vehicles scattered along it, and a railed gantry encircled the chamber half way up. Another tunnel entrance was just visible at the far end. It was also showing it's considerable age, some of the big lights in the roof were out, and the nearest building was cracked, with part of an upper story crumbled away.

"Amazing! The pirates secret port!" Tails exclaimed, looking around in awe. Then he examined the walls more closely. "But what's really amazing it it's still standing. The cold and the dampness hasn't been good to those supports. Don't throw a Kamehameha in here, I'm not sure how much it would take to bring the whole lot down."

"Wow! How'd they get a cool place like this inside a cave?"

The young fox pulled off his muzzle mask. "A lot of hard work. They didn't have Capsules from the age of that sub, so everything had to be carried in piecemeal. There must be an underwater tunnel below this pool big enough to take that thing out. But if they had the money to build this, why would they need to become pirates?"

Suddenly Goku looked around. "Huh? I feel somebody nearby..."

"But no-one..." Tails stopped talking and listened, straining his every sense. There was the sea smell, and old concrete, and a faint smell of oil. There was the humming of a distant generator, and the buzz of overhead lights but nothing... Wait, there was another sound, a eerie wordless 'kekeke!' and a metallic scrape.

"It doesn't feel human..." Goku's brow was furrowed.

One of the downsides of being a genius was having a very fertile imagination. For a moment his hearing was sowing dragon's teeth in it, aided by some of Aunt Bunnie's and Sonic's scarier stories. He imagined the skeleton he saw earlier, and the rest of the pirate crew, rising jerkily from their resting places, eye sockets glowing with pinpoints of red light as they awoke to revenge themselves on the two who had dared enter their domain.

For one moment he was paralysed with terror, but then he saw Goku standing on his own and ready to fight, and felt ashamed. Goku would fight them alone if need be to protect him, and here he was unable to move. He forced himself to think, what had those same stories taught him about fighting skeletons? Knocking them to pieces would just mean they'd pull themselves together, but if you could crush the bones, especially the skull...

He was still scared, shivering, but he took a step forward to stand alongside Goku, ready to fight to protect his back as the young sai-jin exclaimed, "Over there!" .

An eight foot tall figure glided out of an open warehouse door, and zoomed forward to meet them. A humanoid robot, bulk bodied with long pontoon feet, flared guards on its lower legs, it had bulging forearms, one of which terminated in a machine gun, while the other was a clawed hand holding a massive cutlass.

The head was skull-like, forward set with a beast-like, sharp fanged maw. There were red glowing pinpoints deep inside the eye-sockets,

but it was the glow of electronics, not vengeance. The crown of the skull had a massive backwards extension that made it look like a H R Geiger alien, though no Geiger alien would have a skull and crossbones painted on it's forehead. A lashing, segmented tail completed the unlikely but deadly machine that dove towards them.

When the machine gun started chattering, sweeping the concrete, neither Goku or Tails were there to be hit. Both took to the air, Goku leaping over it to rebound and knock it in the back of it's extended skull, while Tails round and came at it from the side in a Tailspin attack buzz saw manoeuvre that sundered the arm carrying the machine gun.

He barely changed direction in time to fly over the cutlass that swung round to slice him in two, aided by Goku knocking the thing off balance. He couldn't avoid the back-hand from the forearm, which sent him flying off across the dock to smack into the conning tower of the old submarine, leaving him embedded in it, facing the fight.

He shook his head, and saw in horror that Goku was bouncing back, cupping his hands together. "Goku, don't blow it up! The shock could bring the whole place down!"

The sai-jin stopped, then ducked under a cross slash from the cutlass that would have taken his head off, and dived between the robot's legs. "Okay, but this guy is tough! What do I do?"

"Keep him occupied and leave him to me!" Tails pulled himself free, noting the damage Goku's first kick had done to the back of the head. "Skeletons may freak me out, but robots I can fight!"

"No problem, I'll just grab it's tail and..." As he fitted word to action, the tail lit up in a crackle of electricity, and he got zapped, hair frizzing out. To make matters worse, the tail curled up around him, holding him in it's coils. Tails immediately launched himself off the conning tower, tails spinning up as he ripped off one glove with his teeth.

He covered the distance in a fraction of a second, and arrested himself by grabbing onto the head of the robot as he flew behind it. His claws jammed into the edge of the weakened panel in the back of it's head, and ripped it off. He then had to dive under a fierce driven cutlass swing, but turned it into another Tailspin attack that sliced through it's tail at the root.

Goku shook himself free of the coils, still a little dazed, and Tails bounced off the floor and flew forward, carrying him away from a vicious cutlass slash that would have filleted him. He zoomed up into the air, only to have the robot activate thrusters under it's pontoon feet, and fly up after him.

"You okay?" Tails called to Goku, letting the glove fall from his mouth as he weaved through outstretched crane booms. Fortunately the robot wasn't anywhere near as manoeuvrable, having to use it's thrusters to stay up in the air as well as to move.

"Arggh! That dummy! Just throw me at him!" Goku reached over his shoulder and pulled out nyoibo, his extending staff. Tails turned over, sighting on the robot just as it flew over the last crane boom. The fox spun up and flung Goku right at him, then used the reaction momentum to rebound off the floor and rear wall to fly after him.

Goku intercepted the robot and his staff blocked the fierce swung cutlass, breaking it in two. His follow up smashed into it's chest plate, stopping it dead. Tails flew overhead and caught the crest of the head, swinging down to land on it's shoulders. He examined the exposed circuitry for a moment, then reached in and ripped out a small circuit board.

The red pinpoints in the robot's eye sockets winked out, and the thrusters died, just as Goku snapped off the arm that held the cutlass stub. It started to drop, only to be caught by Tails, who was hovering in tail-copter mode. "Whoa! Goku, it's done for!"

Goku spun up his own tail, and hovered alongside him, making a V sign. "Heh heh! Victory!"

Tails shrugged as he lowered it to the floor. If Goku wanted to claim the finishing blow, let him. "Yep! I hope I get a chance to examine the design..."

His headset bleeped. He laid out the robot, and pulled down his goggles. "Uh oh! Looks like it'll have to wait, General Blue and a bunch of Red Ribbon thugs, about a dozen, just passed the start of the lights!"

"Yay! Now I get to fight him too!" Goku turned to head back, but Tails stopped him. "Can we get the dragon-ball first?"

"You go on! I'll stay here and take 'em down!" Goku said, looking back at the entrance. "I ain't going to runaway from this guy again!"

"Uh uh!" Tails didn't move. "This guy is supposed to be tough, real tough, and not just as a fighter. According to Colonel Yellow, he can paralyse you by staring at you, some sort of psychic power. If you wear your goggles there's a program similar to the one that blanks out the moon, but it recognises faces, and puts a letterbox over the eyes."

He pulled out his pocket computer and fiddled with it, causing both sets of goggles to bleep. "I wanted to go for the dragon-ball because I'm worried that things will get violent enough in here to start it collapsing. But I'm not going to abandon you. If nothing else, you'll need me to keep the goons occupied while you and he go at it!"

The spiky haired kid grinned, and pulled down his goggles. "Thanks Tails! So this is supposed to make me... whoa!"

He was staring at the fox. "There's a black thing over your eyes!"

"Then it's working!" Tails pulled down his own goggles. "Good! Let's give those goons a few tricks too!"

General Blue waved his men forward. "Move! We have them now, there's no way back!"

The trap had been annoying, but he'd quickly found and broken open the door to the secret passage after the first couple of his men had been speared by it. Now they walked out into a greater chamber.

"The pirate base! Commander Red will be pleased when I not only bring him the dragon balls, but a fortune in pirate treasure!"

He sensed something above him, a figure dropping on him, seen out of the corner of his eye. "Hah! You think to ambush General Blue?"

He jumped upwards, punching, only to encounter the inert hulk of the pirate robot, thruster tanks drained to avoid an explosion. He caved in it's crumpled chest plate, but ended up pinned under it. As he started to heave it off, he heard a motor start up.

"Go check that!" One of the squads of six rushed forward, to see the pirate mini-sub submerge as it headed towards one of the walls.

"They're getting away!"

The walrus leading seaman brought up his rifle, and in seconds the entire group was blazing away at it. They were so focussed on it, that they were completely taken by surprise when Tails shot up out of the water, wearing only his boots, gloves and goggles. He appeared between the centre pair and hand chopped outwards on both sides, with a force gauged to knock out.

They slumped and their guns fell into the water. The only reason they didn't follow the guns was because Tails grabbed them by the scuff of their collars. He spun in a Prower drill driver, swinging them around with him, and knocking the next outer two flying, one across the hardtop, the other into the water. The outermost pair, a big black guy, and the walrus finally realised they were under attack, and turned to shoot him.

But fast as they were, Tails was faster. He hauled his unwilling flails round to one side and flung them both at the black guy, bowling him over. He used the reaction force to throw himself at the walrus, spinning to hit the amphibian in the bread basket with both feet. His



arm was otherwise occupied smacking the rifle out of the way with an open handed smash that sent it spinning off into the water.

A swift uppercut as the walrus was bowled over backwards, and that foe was out for the count. He bounded over to the goon who's simply been knocked across the dock, and dropped on him with a punch to the jaw that sent him into unconsciousness.

General Blue had finally thrown the huge robot off, and yelled to the remaining four with him. "Shoot! Shoot that little fox brat! I'll Baby Blue him!"

"But sir, what about our own men!" exclaimed one of them.

The General drew his pistol and shot the man in the chest. "Any more questions?"

The other three raised their rifles, just as Goku dropped on them from the gantry above, and flattened them with a flurry of punches.

He fixed General Blue with a stare, as the Red Ribbon commander was emptying his pistol in the direction of Tails. The fox was so shocked at the General's callous treatment of his own soldiers he didn't even dodge. However, he had enough time to focus his ki into his skin and fur, and snap his arms up in a cross block to protect his face so they ricocheted away.

"Hey, that guy was on your side!" Goku exclaimed.

"He failed to obey my orders." the general sneered. "Disobedience means death. As does failing to obey the Red Ribbon Army. Now hand over the dragon balls and your dragon ball radar, or I'll relieve you of them myself, after I relieve you of your miserable lives!"

"Uh uh!" Goku took a stance, as Tails grabbed some air. "I'm not letting you take nothing. I was going to fight you anyway, and now I've seen just how mean you are, I ain't going to hold nothing back neither!"

"Ohohoho! You don't know what your facing! Come on then, let me teach you!" General Blue dropped into a crouching fighting stance.

"I can tell you, his power level's up around twenty six." Tails called to Goku, working his goggles. "I might have trouble with him, but you should be able to handle him like an all you can eat buffet!"

Goku frowned at the larger man, circling almost toe to toe. "I ain't going to eat him, just defeat him!"

Tails took the opportunity of the General being focussed on Goku to zip down and check the Red Ribbon soldier who'd been shot. He'd pitched forward on his face, and the wide pool of blood and the smell told Tails, who'd seen enough dead bodies at Karin, that he couldn't do anything for him.

"Hyoh!" General Blue struck first, a punch that would have felled a horse if there had been one in the way, and at a speed which left an audible whip-crack. However, Goku dived under it with a punch of his own that went deep into Blue's gut. He doubled over, choking as Goku jumped back.

"Oh! Urg! So you're not a total pushover..." the Red Ribbon general gasped, holding his stomach. It proved to be partly a feint, as he dropped down and brought a leg around in a sweeping kick.

Goku sprung up in the air, leaving a faint after image, and rebounded off the underside of the gantry above them. He powered down knee out, and smashed Blue in the back of the neck, making his eyes bug out. He fell on his face, crying "Owww owww owww!"

Goku looked disappointed as he jumped off. "Phooey! These guys all talk tough, but they can't back it up!"

"Shame! Humiliation! Is that all you know how to give?" General Blue sat up, pushing himself up to stand. "You have earned your demise thrice over!"

"Does that mean you still want to fight?" Goku asked, standing ready.

The General glared at him, focussing his powers. His eyes flashed and the brat was frozen in place. "Ha! How do you like my telekinesis?"

Tails whispered over the goggles comm, "He must think you're unable to move! You can let him get close and really let him have it!"

But the General called out as he approached. "You, fox-boy! Get down here and give me all your dragon balls and the radar, or I'll break him piece by piece!"

Tails decided to keep up the charade. "That's cruel!"

"Cruel. Such a lovely word!" the general preened. "Let me show you how cruel I can be!"

He was right in front of Goku, and drew his leg back, then brought it forward in a kick that would have put Goku over the goal line if it had connected. But it flew through the after-image of the boy instead, putting the General off balance as he failed to connect.

"So you like bein' cruel, huh?" Goku called from above. "Time for you an' me to play paper, scissors... Rock!"

He powered downwards, as the general stuttered, "L..look into my eyes!"

As he reached the general, Goku brought a hand forward, but with two fingers extended, poking them into Blue's eyes.

"My eyes! My eyes!" The general was staggering about, hands over his abused eye-balls. "You said it would be rock!"

"Okay, you asked for it!" Goku followed up with a "Paper, scissors, ROCK!" and a mighty punch that sent the Red Ribbon Army boss flying into a wall. He slid down and lay sprawled and unconscious.

"Serves you right for being so evil!" Goku said.

Tails spun up in a short Tailspin to dry himself off, and dropped down by the group of goons by the water's edge. The one who'd simply been knocked out into the water had swum to the dockside and hauled himself up, but showed no inclination to start round two. The others were either unconscious or groaning their way awake.

"I suggest you leave. Now." Under normal circumstances the picture would have been ridiculous, a naked fox kit staring down a group of gangsters. However, none of the Red Ribbon army guys were laughing.

"Uggh!" The walrus groaned. "They're going to kill us!"

"I know, I read your orientation manual. But Blue Base is currently being taken into custody by the regular army and your main sub is on the surface, and sending out a radio beacon that should bring the navy right to them courtesy of a little message I left behind.

"All the Red Ribbon field forces are now out of action, and we know the main base is forting up. So now would be a good time to quit. I'm sorry about your friend, but there was nothing we could do."

"He wasn't a friend, just another guy in this crappy company!" said the walrus.

Tails shook his head. "He stood up to General Blue to stop you getting shot. That makes him a friend in my book. I'm sorry I couldn't save him."

"You're really just letting us go?" The soaked one exclaimed. "But we tried to kill you!"

Several of the others glared at him for reminding the fox who'd proved he could kill them all without breaking a sweat of that little fact.

"And if you'd succeeded, I might have been annoyed. Though to be fair, you'd have needed bigger guns." Tails shrugged. "Besides, Batheos class mini-sub's don't have the range to reach the mainland, and the big one over there is in no fit state to go anywhere. Your only feasible destination is Blue base, or to let the navy pick you up when you get to the surface."

"They'll arrest us!" The same waterlogged guy replied.

"Yes, but to be fair, you are part of an evil criminal organisation. A few years in jail is still better than your only way out an hour ago." Tails pointed to the crumpled form of the soldier Blue had killed.

"He's right. The time has come," The walrus said, "To surrender and take our lumps. I never wanted to be in this crazy outfit anyway. I thought it an independent salvage firm was hiring, and by the time I found out what was really going on, the only way out was in a box. Maybe we can get a lighter sentence if we turn over... what did you call him? Baby Blue over there."

"Hey Tails! You all finished?" Goku called.

"Is General Blue well and truly out of it?" Tails asked.

"Out cold!" the sai-jin replied, kneeling down by the stricken Red Ribbon commander.

"Then I leave the rest to you." Tails told the walrus.

Both his boots now had pockets, something Tails had put into them at Capsule Corps, inspired by Aunt Sally's. One held the Capsule case, the other the dragon ball radar, which wouldn't have worked while capsulised. This was the first time he'd actually used them, as he'd been wearing clothes with better pockets all the time before now. He reached down and activated it, then reached up to switch the functions on his goggles to display it.

Tails walked away to join Goku at the other entrance. As the pair of them headed out through the tunnel, the wet soldier turned to the walrus. "Are you crazy? All of us together couldn't keep General Blue down!"

The walrus gave a mirthless grin. He stalked over to the General, and started checking his pockets. "Who said we'd bring him in alive? After all, we're only following his example. Remember when he had that radar operator shot for picking his nose? Not to mention throwing those two into that trap to see how it worked. His orders were to stop those two. He failed, and we all know what the penalty is for failure, and disobeying orders."

He pulled out a Capsule from the General's pockets, which he popped to reveal a shotgun. Checking it, he nodded. "Solid shells, I figured as much. As the ranking active officer of this squad of the Red Ribbon Army, I discharge all of you from service, with no further penalty or hindrance. Of course, General Blue is about to receive his discharge too..."

He raised the shotgun and pointed it between the General's eyes.

"Did you hear a cracking sound?" Tails asked. "Maybe the cave structure is weaker than we thought."

"Then we'd better get the dragon ball fast!" Goku replied as they came to a T junction.

"Right!"

"Okay, so which way do we go?"

Tails turned down the right hand fork. "Right, like I said."

They quickly came to the end of the corridor, which had an open trapdoor in the floor, with water in the bottom.

"I make it thirty more metres, straight ahead." Tails worked the controls on his goggles. "Looks like we swim from here..."

Goku dived right in, as Tails pulled a Capsule case from the pocket in his boot, and popped the empty ration crate, which now had the breathers in. He put one on and kept out the other when he re-capsulised the crate, then dived in after Goku. Radar, goggles and capsules were water-proof of course.

He popped up out of the water at the far end to see Goku already there, standing by a big brass bound wooden chest.

Tails walked over, wide eyed. "Wow! They may have been modern in some ways, but if that isn't a traditional pirate's chest, I don't know what is!"

Goku looked puzzled. "What is this pirate treasure you keep going on about?"

"Huh? You never heard stories about pirates when you were growing up?" Tails exclaimed. "Oh, right, I guess not. Well, I'll explain later, but for now, this is a treasure."

He hauled up the lid, and revealed the box was filled to the brim with valuables. Gold coins and bullion were the least of it, there were hundreds of gems of all sorts, some as big as a fist. A crown nestled up against a platinum chased gold statue of exquisite workmanship, and a blown glass vase chased with silver and encrusted by matched diamonds, and other jewellery and works of art nestled between the gems.

"Oooh! Shiny!"Goku said, wide eyed.

"You said it!" Tails was equally wide eyed. "And worth more money than we could spend in a dozen lifetimes!"

"But I don't see the dragon ball."

"Oh, that's at the bottom of that pool on the far side of the cave. Here." Tails went over and switched the modes on Goku's goggles. Then he popped the empty Capsule crate and closed the lid on the pirate chest.

"Whatcha doin'?" asked Goku.

"I think this chest will just about fit in the Capsule crate. I don't know if we're going to need it, but 'Better to have it and not need it then need it and not have it', as Aunt Sally always said."

"Okay, I'll get the dragon ball." Goku turned away.

"Wait, your breather mask!" This time Tails had a chance to give Goku the breather unit before he dived in.

He'd just finished putting the chest inside the crate, when a voice called out behind him. "Ohoho! So there was treasure! And since your little friend isn't here, I get my fox-skin rug as well."

Tails turned and put up a block, but General Blue moved before he was fully ready. He was thrown backwards into the wall as the general gave him the kick he'd failed to land on Goku earlier.

As Tails was still trying to clear his head, General Blue stalked over and ripped the goggles off his head. The General looked bruised and battered, and his shirt was gone. A part of his perfect blond hair was scorched away, but the scorch across his head didn't seem to impair him. He booted Tails in the ribs.

"Did you really think I wouldn't work out that the goggles you were wearing blocked my telekinetic power?" He glanced down at the display inside, "And they're your dragon ball radar too! Now all I need are the dragon balls you already have, and my mission is complete! It was worth it, getting wet and dirty, and they say sea water is terrible for your skin..."



Tails thought furiously as the general whined about his ruined looks. With the goggles went his chance of calling Goku. He was furious with himself for not putting another remote camera by the trapdoor. Playing for time, he asked, "What about the soldiers?"

"Those traitors? I woke up just as they were about to shoot me, and knocked the gun away." He punctuated the comment with a vicious punch to the face that ripped away Tails' mask and had him seeing stars and tasting blood.

"They betrayed you of course, but I didn't have time to deal with them. No matter, I will hunt them down after I finish with you. They will die in agony for marring my perfect face!" General Blue pulled a knife from a boot sheath. "You'll tell me where the dragon balls are soon enough! Look into my eyes..."

Tails had just enough time to recover. Without his goggles, there was no way to block the power, other than closing his eyes. However, he didn't need his goggles to detect the hot, ugly ki radiating off the General. Time to put his training with Namu to use. He closed his eyes and slid out from under the knife, springing to his feet as he glanced around to take note of his surroundings.

"You think you can escape that easily?" The General sneered behind him. "I saw how you fled before. Well there's no where to fly away to now. Even with your eyes open, you don't stand a chance against me!"

Tails ignored the chatter, other than to locate it's source with his sensitive ears. He focussed on calming his heart and his breathing, as he'd been taught, turning in the direction of his foe. He was hurting, but his training with Goku and Kurilin had made him able to push past the pain.

The scrunch of the General's boots on the cave floor, the air rustling over his fur and whiskers, the smell of sweat and blood and cordite, all these were data to be processed, facts that located his opponent.

He stood in an open stance, ready to move in whatever direction necessary.

"No smart remarks? Then I'll let my knife do the talking!"

Tails was tensed for the slightest movement, the slightest change in his surroundings. The general, by comparison was a bull in a glassware factory. Tails could almost see him from the scrape of his boots as he dashed in, and the air movements told him when the general made a lightning swing at the young fox's midriff that would have disembowelled him.

He bent over backwards, pushing himself forwards with his arms as his feet came up. One leg flicked sideways to intercept the returning knife arm, while other drove deep into the General's already abused gut. He felt an icy slash of pain as the knife managed to cut across the side of his ankle, but pushed it aside with all the other stuff he couldn't afford to deal with right now.

Hearing the general's gasp of pain, he brought his upper body forward, clapping his hands over the place where he judged the general's ears to be with as much force as possible. Then he bent his head forward, hauling the general's face onto his forehead. There was a satisfying crunch and a girlish shriek as he kicked back off.

"Arggh! My face, my beautiful face!" Tails risked a brief blink, but it was safe, General Blue was doubled over holding his nose with one hand, and his gut with the other, one that still held the knife. "Blood! A bloody nose! The shame! The humiliation! No-one..."

Tails risked another brief blink, but General Blue was looking at his own hand, not the fox. He sprang up into the air, rebounding off the low ceiling to power down on the distracted guy, who looked up too late to avoid a Tailspin attack that sent him flying, and a follow-up where Tails in full tail-copter mode powered after him and grabbed one flailing arm, back spinning to hurl him across the cave again.

General Blue smashed into the wall, and slid down, leaving a bloody trail. Tails had his eyes closed again, but he could sense the general's ki, weaker now, and his harsh breathing, slightly bubbling. He didn't need to look to guess that the General was bleeding at the mouth, though whether it was just a bitten tongue or a punctured lung was up for debate. He was figuring on the latter. Despite the pain he was in, the general was staggering to his feet. Why couldn't he just fall unconscious!

"I am General Blue... No-one who has... seen my shame... can be allowed to live!"

Tails could smell the blood, sharper now, hear the general tensing himself for a final rush, then there was a splashing from the pool where Goku had dived in, and a voice, "Got it..."

He heard the general tense, felt the flare of ki as he focussed his fighting energy, the sound as he turned on his heel, the scrape of metal as the knife came up... He glanced and saw the general had the knife raised to throw at the unsuspecting sai-jin, who was still looking to Tails and holding the three star dragon ball high.

The knife was thrown, and even as Tails called, "Goku, Duck!" he was pulling the first thing that came to hand, his dragon ball radar, from his boot pocket. His ability to calculate trajectories instantly came in handy once again, as he threw the radar to intercept the hard thrown knife.

The two struck a metre in front of Goku's head, and the knife rebounded off the case of the radar, which was thrown past Goku's ear. Goku caught it in his free hand, while the knife flew back towards its origin. It terminated its path, blade first in the chest of the unlucky general.

Tails couldn't look away. He'd only figured a way to intercept the knife, he hadn't tried to work out the rebound trajectory. Nevertheless, he'd just killed someone. General Blue coughed up blood. "You... little brat! If I'm going down, I'm taking you with me!"

He pulled out a small box with a clock face. That unfroze Tails who jumped for the Capsule crate and capsulised it, catching the capsule as he called out to Goku, "It's a bomb! Let's get out of here!"

He checked the sai-jin was following him before he dived into the water. General Blue was still fumbling with the bomb, resetting the timer. Without his goggles, he had to swim with his eyes closed against the sea water, his breather unit was just gone, and the violent movement opened his half clotted wound, causing a spike of pain in his ankle. He wound up his tails and used them to propel him through the water.

Fortunately the tunnel was straight, and Goku caught up with him before he reached the end, guiding him the rest of the way. He was thrown up out of the trapdoor by the sai-jin, and landed at the end of the tunnel as there was a massive boom, and a rumble. The water fountained up from the trap-door with Goku in the middle of it.

Tails was hurting, all his earlier injuries brought back into sharp relief by hitting the floor, but he jumped up and caught Goku as he was flung out of the water. The sai-jin was stunned by the shock-wave transmitted through the water, so Tails carried him, as there was no time to lose.

The ceiling was already cracking, and the lights flickering. Tails ran flat out down the corridor, skidding around the corner into the tunnel to the main chamber just as a fall of rubble crashed down behind him. There was a dreadful screech and groan of tearing metal, and the gantry that encircled the main chamber fell, blocking off the entrance-way ahead of him.

Tails plotted his trajectory with care, and threw the stunned Goku ahead of him. He jumped over his friend and twisted his tails, powering ahead with all the power he had left. He turned it into a Tailspin attack that blasted through the gantry, sending the ends flying. He dropped to the dockside and flew backwards with his arms out, catching Goku as the young sai-jin came through after him.

He looked around the main chamber, the body of the dead soldier was still there, but no-one else was. Rubble and the big lights were crashing down from the ceiling onto the old sub, while the buildings were collapsing and the crane booms were toppling. He sprang out of the way as one steel boom crashed down where he'd been standing.

Goku finally came to his senses. "Huh? What's going on?"

"No time!" Tails put down Goku and plucked the Capsule case from his boot pocket and de-capsulised the Sea Fox, dropping the mini-sub into the water beside the dock. "The whole place is coming down! Get in!"

Tails powered up the compact submarine, starting up the screw even as the canopies sealed themselves. He set the forward planes for maximum down angle and drove the Sea Fox underwater. Debris was still falling all around them, but none of it was hitting the Sea Fox, at least nothing big enough to damage it. The light from above finally went out completely, but Tails just powered up the lights. "Let's get out of here!"

He aimed for the underwater tunnel that the big submarine had used, weaving back and forth around the falling debris. Into the tunnel the mini-sub plunged, evading a falling beam that crossed half the entrance by rolling up on it's side, keel facing the beam and cranking the bow planes to maximum up angle draw them aside. They veered towards the other wall, and Tails rolled the Sea Fox over to the other side, pulling them back towards the centre of the tunnel.

The tunnel itself was starting to collapse but with headlights and the sonar systems of the Sea Fox, Tails could navigate between the falling rocks. One great collapse almost completely blocked off the main tunnel, but Tails found a gap and rolled the Sea Fox to squeeze it through, just before another boulder came down and sealed it forever. "Whoa! That was too close!"

They burst out of the cave mouth and into the open sea, a wash of rock dust and debris shooting out after them, and Tails could finally relax. He sighed with relief as he slowed the compact sub down. He angled the bow planes up and headed for the surface, finally starting to feel the damage he'd taken.

"Ooh! My everything hurts... Goku, are you alright?"

"Yeah! I'm fine!" the spiky haired kid was disgustingly chipper for someone who'd just been through that. "You don't sound too good though."

"You can say that again..." Suddenly what had happened hit him. It was one thing to say you'd kill to protect someone, another thing to actually do it. "I... I killed him! I don't think I'll ever be good again."

"He was an evil guy, and he was going to kill you, kill us both, and you did it to save me. Besides, how could you know that knife would go that way?" Goku reassured him.

"I didn't... I didn't calculate the rebound and I should have." Tails slumped in his seat.

Goku didn't do complex thinking, but he knew when a friend was hurting. "You saved me, you even saved those Red Ribbon guys by letting them go. General Blue was the one who threw the knife, who wouldn't give up. I know your really smart an' all, but even you couldn't think of everything. You did your best with what you had... isn't that all that you could do?"

The Sea Fox burst out of the water, and Tails reconfigured for hover-mode. The sun was still in the sky, and even he felt a lift in his spirits. "I guess so..."

"Tell you what!" Goku said, "The old timer lives around here. Why don't we go see him? He'll tell you the same thing, you haven't done anything to feel guilty about! Plus we can get you fixed up there."

He patted the symbol over his chest. "Oh! Hey, I know something that'll cheer you up!"

He reached into his gi and pulled out the three star dragon ball. "Only two more to go!"

That reminded Tails of something. "Huh! I completely forgot about that!"

He brought the Sea Fox round on a heading to Master Roshi's island, and set the auto-pilot. As they flew off, he reached down in the boot pocket that had held the dragon ball radar and pulled out a single capsule. "Here's the treasure! I got the capsule as we were escaping."

He put it away in his capsule case. "I don't need to return the Sea Fox any more, I should have enough money to buy the parts outright."

He patted the console of the Sea Fox. "I'm glad. She came through for us in a pinch. I wouldn't want to salvage her, any more than you'd want to give up Kinto-un."

They flew for a few moments in silence, and Tails thought over what Goku had said. Could he have stopped General Blue, short of killing him? He'd done his best to knock the guy out, but he'd kept coming. So, no. Even if he'd been crippled, he would still have had that bomb.

The rebounding knife was an accident, but if he'd had no other way to save Goku, would he have still fought to the death? Yes, without question. Well, since General Blue would not have stopped, in a way that was the situation, and he'd forced the issue. Goku was right, up to a point. While he didn't feel it absolved him completely, he started to feel a bit better about it.

Finally he spoke. "Goku, thanks for being my friend. Thanks for everything!"

The sai-jin blushed slightly, then grinned. "Hey, what are friends for?"

"Telling their friends when they're being stupid. While I can't avoid all of the blame for what happened, I can't take all the blame either. Thank you for making me see that."

There were another few minutes of silence, then Goku spoke.  
"Y'know, we could get there a lot faster on Kinto-un!"

"I don't think I'm up to flying at the moment."

"It's okay, I'll carry you."

Tails smiled. "You've done that a lot for me on this quest."

"No more than you did me." Goku replied, forthrightly. "You built this sub and the dragon ball radar, and figured out all that other stuff. Not to mention hauling me out of that cave."

That made the young fox grin. "Then I guess that's something else friends are for."

**Authors Notes:** Sorry for the extra long chapter, but I had that many things to get in. I was trying to balance getting in the maximum amount of adventure with not overselling it. I hope people think I struck the right balance. Everything I used was actually in the original comics, even down to the time bomb, though I like to think I used them in original ways.

The action parts were fairly easy, but as always the scenes about feelings, especially the last one, were hard. Tails is not over having killed his first person, but he's less likely to go into a depression over it thanks to Goku's emotional first-aid.

Tails taking damage in the final fight with Blue was also something I had to wrestle with. This was the first time in some time that Tails faced someone of comparable power level, and the first time ever he



did so solo, and against an opponent that was out to kill him as far as I remember.

A note also about the weapons, and relative danger. Bullets and melee attacks are fairly blunt impacts. A blade concentrates the force of a blow to a far greater degree. That's why a Kevlar bullet-proof vest is still vulnerable to a knife. So it is with ki enhanced toughness. Even though Goku and Tails could resist bullets, the bladed weapons were still a threat to them if driven hard enough.

# Tails of Blue Water Part 4

## Chapter 23 - Tails of Blue Water Part 4

The Sea Fox powered down, landing on a strip of golden beach, palm trees waving overhead in the late afternoon breeze. The bubble canopies slid back and folded up, and Goku bounded out, followed more gingerly by Tails.

"Yay! Coconuts!" The spiky haired martial artist headed for the nearest trees. Tails dropped down by the hull of the Sea Fox, and stored it away in his capsule case. They had meant to stop on this small atoll just long enough for Goku to call in Kinto-un, and head off to Master Roshi's, but with Goku chasing off after food, that would have to wait.

The salt water from their recent swim was making his fur itch like crazy, not to mention the cut on his leg, so he popped the type seven capsule house and hit the shower. About twenty minutes later, feeling at least a thousand times better, he stepped out with a tray full of sandwiches, a big towel, and a bandage over his leg. He stored the house, ready to set off as soon as they'd eaten, and put the capsule case in a sealed boot pocket.

Goku came back to the shore with arms full of coconuts, and a big bunch of bananas. "Look what I found!" he said happily.

"They look delicious." Tails smiled back. "Care for a sandwich?"

Since Goku had never been known to refuse any sort of food ever, the answer was predictable. They sat down together on the towel, sharing the food, and each other's company. It was such a nice day, Tails hadn't bothered to put his coveralls back on. It wasn't like Goku would object.

He hadn't gone Mobian like this for a long time, and it was refreshing to let the warm breeze ruffle his fur. He'd even taken his boots and gloves off, though his goggles still rested on his forehead, more for the fact that he could set the display function to act like sunglasses than anything else.

Suddenly Goku thought of something. "Hey! I forgot to give you this!"

He pulled out a small bag, and gave Tails an unremarkable looking green bean.

"One of these Senzu beans?" Tails asked, taking it and examining it closely.

"Yeah, it'll fix you right up, heal any injury." Goku said eagerly.

"Then I'll save it. I've had worse injuries during our training together. I'll heal up by tomorrow." Tails put it away in the sealable pocket in other boot that had held the radar, and now held his computer. Then he gave a start. "The dragon ball! I forgot to store it away! Right now we can be detected. And I lost my radar."

Goku handed him the ball, and pulled out the dented radar he'd caught. "It's okay, I got that too!"

Tails popped the capsule chest with the dragon ball storage box in, and quickly put the orange orb away with the others. As he stored the chest, he sighed, "That's a relief. They've probably located us, but even if they had a fast jet on the launch pad, and launched the second we stopped, by the time they get here, we'll be long gone."

He examined the radar. "Darn it, busted! Oh well, I'll fix it when we get to Master Roshi's, for now I'll cross link to yours. I'll set up the power level scanner for both of us, I want to show that off to Master Roshi and Kurilin."

He pulled out his pocket computer and started working on it, altering the programs of the goggles remotely. He'd just put his computer

away, when Goku looked up in the air.

"Huh? I can feel something, someone powerful, maybe more than one. They're far away but getting nearer fast..."

Tails pulled down his goggles, and started doing a power level scan. They were there, in the sky, a thirty six, a thirty, and a twenty. And their rate of approach... He jumped up. "None of them are quite as powerful as you, but one is close, and only one is less powerful than me!"

He pulled on his boots and gloves, then switched in binocular mode, and saw an approaching dot, but found it hard to focus on, so he pulled his goggles back up.

Goku was stood beside him, and they both jumped aside as a marble pillar with broken ends pierced the towel they'd been sitting on, sending the smashed plate flying, and scattering the remains of the bunch of bananas.

"Hey!" Goku exclaimed, "I was enjoying those sandwiches!"

The tall saturnine figure stepped down, crushing the remains of the plate underfoot. "Then savour them, because they are the last you will ever enjoy!"

He had a wide moustache, heavy eyebrows, and his hair was cut on his forehead in a widow's peak, with a long pigtail at the back. He clearly had the advantage of his younger companion, who appeared to lack any hair at all under his tasselled cap, though the extra eye in his forehead made up for it.

The final figure had been clinging to the pillar rather than balancing on it, much shorter than his fellows and also lacking hair, or for that matter colour in his face, other than red cheeks. He lifted up off the pillar and floated in mid-air, at head height with the others.

All three were wearing Chinese style tunics and pants, with a black Kanji symbol on a white background on their chests. However, the first was in pink and black, while the others were in yellow and green, and the symbols on their chests were different. The leader glanced down at the symbol on Goku's chest.

"It will be doubly delightful because you are both the students of my elder brother's rival school. We may not get on, but even he was glad to lend me my old students to see two less Turtle school students in the world."

Tails made a connection with something Pilaf's bodyguards had said. "Master Tsuru, the Crane Master? So you're Tao Pai Pai, the assassin."

Goku was just looking back and forth, puzzled.

"I see you've done your homework." The man sneered, "Pity it won't do you any good. Both of you, deal with the fox. I'll kill the monkey myself, and find out where these baubles are that Commander Red wants so badly."

Goku took a stance. "So you're this Too Pee Pee guy everyone's been going on about but you're not going to kill me so easily, and you ain't going to get the dragon balls."

"Tao Pai Pai, you little nincompoop!" the assassin growled. "I was going to kill you quickly, but just for that, I'll make you suffer!"

He dashed forward, and Goku faded back into the tree-line.

Tails turned to face the other two, knowing at least one of them had more power than him. "And you are..."

"Tien Shinhan." said the bigger bald guy. He indicated the smaller one. "And Chiaotsu. Not that the knowledge will do you any good."

He seemed different from his boss, no nicer, but his expression didn't seem as callous. The little guy laughed and pointed. "Look, he hasn't any clothes on!"

"It's not like I was expecting company." Tails replied, affecting a nonchalance he didn't really feel. "I didn't realise there was a dress code for being assassinated."

He slid down the goggles again, and gulped. Chiaotsu was the twenty, but Tien was the thirty six! "You're more powerful than Tao Pai Pai!"

"Flattery won't save you. Now prepare to die!" Tien blurred forward, and Tails reacted as fast as possible, evading the strike as Tien appeared where he'd been standing by jumping up and hovering almost 10 metres up.

"I was telling the truth!" He called down. "I developed a power level scanner. That's why I know Tao Pai Pai's weaker than Goku, by quite a lot. You're closer, but you're less powerful too."

"Stop talking nonsense!" Tien yelled. "And don't think your flying trick will help you!"

He rose up into the air himself, without visible effort, and Chiaotsu followed him. "Levitation is a speciality of the Crane school."

Tails swallowed another lump in his throat. One of his few advantages over most enemies was his ability to fly, and that had just been neutralised. The bald martial artist flickered again, and Tails barely had time to put up a block before a knee slammed into it, sending him flying backwards and downwards to smash into the sand.

He forced himself to jump up and away, just in time to evade a follow-up strike that would have buried him. He was fully on his metal now, up in the air and evading strike after strike like a vulpine hummingbird. He tried to find a hole in the others defence, but the

few strikes he got seemed to barely affect the other man. He, on the other hand was not evading every strike, and this guy hit like Goku, or even harder.

The earlier injuries he'd taken from Blue were not helping. They might not be serious, but they were robbing him of that last little edge just when it would have been helpful. His goggles were just gone, but the nearly indestructible Mobian synthetics of his gloves and boots were holding up.

He tried flickering away with an after-image technique, but Tien almost effortlessly turned to block the real him. "Ha! It seems three eyes are better than two tails!"

That gave Tails an idea. He went to full speed, taking a painful hit in one leg to kick off for some distance, and cranked his tails up to maximum propeller speed before kicking over to Deuce Juice.

Boosting away at faster than the speed of sound, he didn't hear Tien call that "Running away won't save you!" But that wasn't what he had in mind. He powered up to his maximum with his battle aura wrapped tightly around him, and turned straight up, heading towards the sun, squinting and wishing for his vanished goggles. He did a fast Immelmann, and dived back towards the other at super-sonic velocity aided by the dive, right out of the sun.

Just before he reached Tien he went to his most powerful Tailspin attack, one which had sliced through Osaru-Goku's tail at the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, though in bludgeoning mode, not slicing. While the other martial artist had a block up, he powered through it, and his Tailspin attack slammed the other down into the beach just by the tree line.

He had a momentary advantage and pressed it, following up with a dive right into the crater left by Tien's impact. He landed on the other fighter with his uninjured foot, giving it everything he had left, and felt the other sag under the impact.

He jumped back out, favouring his injured leg, and looking around for Chiaotsu, and it was as well he did as the smaller fighter dived in with a flurry of kicks and punches, screaming "Tien! No!"

Tails was tired by his finishing move, but this time could match and exceed his opponents strikes. He took off into the air to avoid pulling weight on his leg, blocking Chiaotsu's attacks and driving him back with punches, battering him out of the air. Feeling more confident, he grabbed one of the smaller fighter's arms, and powered up a Tailspin to sling him into a tree, leaving him lying there stunned.

"I'm sorry." Tails panted, the combined effort of his special attack and continuing the fight had taken its toll on his stamina. "I didn't kill him, but I had to defend myself."

"Heh! That wasn't bad. Maybe if you'd been stronger, you might even have hurt me..."

Tails turned in shock, as Tien jumped out of the crater he'd been in. The guy's hat was gone, confirming his baldness, and his tunic had been ripped away too. But he looked almost uninjured. Chiaotsu yelled joyfully, "Tien!"

"But I knocked you out..." Tails was scared for real now, but did his best not to show it. What did it take to stop this guy?

"You came close, but you didn't quite ring the bell." He strode forward, wiping away a trickle of blood from his lips. He helped Chiaotsu up, as Tails gathered his energy for another attempt. "However, you hurt Chiaotsu, and for that I'm going to hurt you."

"I'm only trying to defend myself..." Tails repeated. "I don't want to fight. Why do you, is it just the money?"

"Ha!" Tien sneered. "A martial artist doesn't need money. I follow Master Crane and Master Tao Pai Pai because they can train me to be stronger, stronger than anyone."



Tails was standing on the sand, trying to hide his injury and his fear, but the leg was strained, if sprained. He straightened up all the same, ignoring the stab of pain it caused. Maybe he could get through to this guy in some other way than fighting him...

"But you use that strength for all the wrong things. You're an amazing fighter, and you could do so much good. You care for Chiaotsu, and he cares for you. I don't think an evil person could do that. So there's good in you somewhere! Tao Pai Pai didn't even use your names..."

"Shut up!" Tien growled. "I don't need your pathetic moralising. I just need to be strong! Being good won't stop you from being defeated by me!"

"Being a martial artist is about being strong, yes, but it's also about how you use that strength, to protect the innocent!" Tails was almost ready to try again, but he seemed to be making an impression. Tien wasn't laughing it off, he was getting angry. What was it Aunt Bunnie had said? 'The truth hurts, sugar-fox, and the bigger the truth, the more someone will roar.'

"Enough!" Tien yelled. "Chiaotsu! Paralyse him, especially his mouth!"

Tails looked away from the floating figure, but he found himself frozen all the same. Looking out the corner of his eye, he could see Chiaotsu had his arms outstretched. So this technique was focussed through the hands, not the eyes.

Inwardly he raged at himself. He hadn't been willing to use the slicing version of his Tailspin technique, which would have killed or crippled the three eyed martial artist, and now he was going to pay for it. He'd really thought there might be a better way...

Tails experienced a moment of terror as the other loomed over him. Tien powered forward, and landed a punch on Tails' unprotected rib cage. Crunch! The pain of the resulting broken ribs, and possible

punctured lung, was large and all consuming. Ki enhanced toughness that had allowed him to leave indentations in rock and metal still couldn't stop the full impact of Tien's blows.

Tien kicked out, Crack! and his injured leg was broken. He took Tails' left arm in both hands and twisted, and Crunch! his elbow was smashed. A grip on his throat and a full power right hook, and his muzzle was misshapen and bleeding, with broken teeth and a blood filled mouth.

"Not so chatty now, are you!" Tien yelled, grabbing the broken arm and twisting. Tails gasped and tears formed in his eyes as the pain redoubled. "Still think there's good in me? Still think I'm weak like you? How about this then!"

Tails was barely conscious, let alone able to move, but through the pain wracking his body he could feel himself being bent forward over Tien's knee, and both hands grab the roots of his tails. He tried to focus his ki to resist what he knew was coming, but he was hurting so much...

"Hyaaaaarrrrgggghh!" Tien's muscles bulged, and he started showing a visible battle aura. Tails' tails were showing an aura of their own, and it was clear Tien was struggling, but with a last supreme effort, he ripped the fox's tails from their roots, and threw the crippled kitsune to the ground.

Tien held his trophies over Tails. "Lose something?"

Tails wanted nothing more than to lay down and die. He could feel the wet warmth of the blood soaking the fur around his tail stumps, and the absence of his beloved brushes. He was weak, and he was in agony all over, except for the parts which weren't communicating at all. He wasn't scared any-more, or rather he didn't feel it as a separate emotion, but as part of the whole feeling of helplessness and pain.

Most of all, the ki that he'd learned to feel flowing through his body was almost completely gone. The only upside was the fact that he could move again, though considering the pain it caused to do anything, that was at the very most a mixed blessing.

The only thing that kept him from slipping into unconsciousness was a single thought, Goku. He'd failed to use lethal force when he had his one shot to make it count, and now he was almost certainly going to pay for it with his life. However, he couldn't let Goku pay for his squeamishness. He was sure Goku would defeat Tao Pai Pai. However, if these two joined in though, they could probably take even Goku, even without Chiaotsu's paralysis technique.

The problem was the same as way back on Robotnik's machine, and the solution was the same too. He couldn't save himself, but he could save his friend. That determination, that will to protect his friend kept him from slipping away. He had to keep them occupied for as long as possible, so Goku could finish up, and somehow disable Chiaotsu. There was even the possibility that if Tails himself was still alive, Goku's return could save him too, which would be a nice bonus.

Somehow the fatalism that had slipped over him helped with the pain, and the fear, as it had back then. He gritted his teeth, then spat out the broken ones and a mouthful of blood, and lifted himself on his one good arm. His vision was blurry, but he could see a broken branch, brought down by the fight, the right size to use as a crutch. He hauled it in, pushing down the shrieks of pain his body was bombarding him with, and levered himself to stand, after a fashion, crutch under the shoulder of his non-working arm..

"You're kidding..." Tien looked incredulous. "I can break you with a finger!"

Tails spat out another mouthful of blood, bringing his working hand up to gently wipe the blood and snot and tears from his muzzle. Tears were still dribbling down, but he did his best to look Tien

straight in the eye. Each word hurt, but he tried to make each one clear.

"You have... taken tails... take my life next... Look you... in eye... May kill me... not defeat me! Strength... not Tao Pai Pai's."

"Then I'll settle for just killing you!" Tien growled, and took a stance.

Then Tails had an inspiration. He crouched on his good knee, almost falling from the pain. The swaying put his hand on the edge of his boot, and allowed him to palm the Senzu bean.

"Maybe I won't need to do anything more than watch you fall over." Tien folded his arms.

Tails coughed out blood again, but this time he placed the bean in his mouth when he wiped it. Biting hurt, swallowing hurt even more, but he hoped that it would work as advertised.

As quickly as moving from shadow to sunlight, all the pain vanished. His body was still dirty but whole, his muzzle still smeared with various stuff but undamaged, and his twin tails once again waved proudly out behind him. Tails gasped in relief. Even the lesser injuries that General Blue had inflicted were gone, and he felt as if he'd just gotten up after a good nights sleep and had a hearty breakfast. "And maybe not!"

"Im... impossible!" Tien gasped. "Even I haven't learned how to generate new limbs yet! I found the technique in an old scroll I found on my travels, and even Master Tsuru doesn't know about it! How did you learn it? Where did you get the ki to power it?"

Tails was intrigued that there was a ki technique for that, but he just looked stern, and realised he could push the bluff some more. "You know, I told you Goku's yours and Tao Pai Pai's power level, but I never told you what mine was... Still think good equals weak? I was flying when I was four years old. When did you learn to levitate?"

The shot had struck home, he could see that. Tien started to say, "Chiao..."

Tails moved at his full speed, leaving an after-image and reappearing behind Chiaotsu. In a flash, he had the white faced Crane student's arms gripped in a bear hug from behind.

"Yeaah!" The little martial artist flailed his legs, and tried to kick and reverse head-butt his way out of the hold, but Tails was faster and more powerful, and could evade his attacks.

"If you dare hurt Chiaotsu, I will make you feel pain like you've never felt before!" screamed Tien.

"You already did." Tails growled, nodding at the limp bundles of red and white fur Tien still held. He squeezed, and Chiaotsu started gasping for air. "And I could do something just as permanent to Chiaotsu, while keeping him alive to use him as a shield, if I subscribed to your philosophy that only physical strength is important. But I don't, so I'm only going to knock him unconscious."

He let go one arm, and placed a precise blow to Chiaotsu's neck before the Crane student could wriggle free. The boy slumped, unconscious. "And please don't try to attack, I've already proved I can move faster than you."

"You... you..." Tien fumed, but didn't risk an offensive move.

"I didn't want to hurt anyone, so I'd give him back in return for a promise that neither of you will try to hurt me or Goku further, but you already said that you don't believe in honour, so I can't trust you to keep your word. You kill people for a living so one more wouldn't matter."

"I never said that!" Tien yelled. "I do believe in honour, the honour of my school, the honour between master and student. And I have never broken my word, or killed anyone!"

Tails shook his head. "But you were willing to. You already stated only physical strength counts with you. The only reason you don't attack is because I hold the position of strength. If I follow your belief to it's logical conclusion, if I were to let Chiaotsu go, you'd attack, no matter what promises you made.

"So we're in a stalemate, unless Goku returns, in which case you're toast, or I repeat my earlier move and this time, I don't hold back. I can focus my Tailspin into an edge that can split a Kamehameha in two. I did it at the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, and I've gotten stronger since then." Part of him wanted to do just that, but he held it back.

Tien looked enraged, but he still wasn't moving "You're right about us only being in a stalemate until someone else arrives, but that will be Master Tao Pai Pai. Then he'll show you who's strength is superior!"

"Yes, Goku's." Tails replied. "He'll beat that guy like a drum. Tao Pai Pai will be begging for mercy, if he's still conscious."

"Ha!" Tien sneered. "Master Tao Pai Pai is second only to Master Tsuru in strength. He won't be beaten by a kid, and he'll never beg for mercy!"

A figure crashed out of the sky, creating a small crater in the sand. It was Tao Pai Pai, shirtless, bruised, battered and with his ponytail half untangled. He pushed himself to his hands and knees facing away from them, as Goku landed in front of him. The sai-jin took a crane stance, and called out, "Here I come again!"

"Wait! I'm sorry, forgive me!" Tao Pai Pai exclaimed, "I'll swear I'll never commit evil deeds again!"

"Huh? But after all the evil things you said you'd done..." Goku dropped out of stance.

"Please, have mercy!" Tao Pai Pai begged.

"Master!" Tien cried out, shocked, running over to him. "You taught me there is only victory or death!"

Goku looked over at Tails, "What do you think I should do?"

Suddenly Tao Pai Pai sprang up. "Die! You fell for it! Wahaha!"

He threw an object between Goku and Tien, and sprang up into the air in a massive, ki assisted jump that took him hundreds of metres up. Tails realised it had to be a grenade of some kind, and released Chiaotsu, yelling, "It's a bomb!". He moved across at full speed between the two nearest to it, however, Goku reacted first, kicking it into the air like a rocket.

"Farewell fools!" Tao Pai Pai yelled from his safe viewpoint up above, just before the grenade reached him. He saw it next to him, and his last words were, "Eh? Nooo..."

The explosion was several times as wide as the distance between Tien and Goku.

Tien was still looking up in shock. "You... you killed Master Tao Pai Pai!"

"And saved you, and maybe the rest of us, from the size of that explosion." Tails immediately replied. "Is that who you aspire to be? A man who promises things which he breaks the next breath? Who sees others as disposable, or do you think he'd have stayed his hand if Chiaotsu was in the dead centre of that blast? Is that the honour you spoke of?"

Tien collapsed to his knees. "I... he... he never... I thought... he disgraced the Crane school with his actions! He broke his solemn vow!"

Tails moved to stand beside Goku. "So, how do we do this? Are you going to attempt to complete his mission? I assume the Red Ribbon

Army hired him to kill us, and recover our dragon balls, at, what was it? 100 million zeni a piece?"

"They did?" Goku asked.

"It was 50 million a piece, it was his 20th year anniversary half price sale." Tien said absently, slumping down by Chiaotsu.

"Oh great, not only are we under threat of death, we're on offer!" Tails said with a huff.

Goku still looked confused, but finally noticed the state of his friend, and the tails in Tien's hand. "Hey, what are those?"

"Tien didn't want a fair fight, so he had Chiaotsu paralyse me, like Blue could, and proceeded to break my bones, finishing off by ripping my tails out at the roots, to make me suffer before he killed me." The fox shivered, actually shrinking in on himself as he remembered what had happened, and not just the pain, but the loss, the feeling of violation as he'd been crippled.

Goku saw Tails cringe and the easy going, somewhat goofy boy was suddenly solid battle aura. Tien felt it, and for the first time felt fear, scrambling back from the raging sai-jin. Goku's nominal power level was by this time closer to forty, and his rage only increased it. "HE DID WHAT?"

Part of Tails wanted to see Goku take Tien to pieces, the same part that wanted to continue the fight, strike back at the person who hurt him so cruelly. But that wasn't all of him, and it was the other part that controlled what he said next. "Goku, it's okay, I'm healed back up."

That caused the battle aura to subside. "Hey, yeah! You figured out how to regrow your tails like me?"

"Sort of. I understand why he did it, I'd fought and knocked out his friend, and he wanted to hurt me in return, just like you just wanted



to hurt him, in return for his hurting me."

Tien looked almost ashamed. "You're defending me? That... that wasn't all..."

"I know." Tails stated flatly. "I told you some things you didn't want to hear, things that hurt you, that you didn't want to think, and you wanted to shut me up, and hurt me back."

His own battle aura was starting up as he reacted to the fear he'd felt. "Well you succeeded, I'm actually scared of you, of what you did to me, and that makes me angry! I haven't been scared of anything I could see and fight for months, I thought I'd become brave, and you made me feel terror worse than I ever have!"

"But you stood up to me, right at the end when you were dying..." Tien said.

"I couldn't let you join forces with Tao Pai Pai. Together you might have had a chance against Goku. If killing me kept you from joining that fight, it was worth it."

"Tails, you didn't need to do that!" Goku exclaimed.

"I didn't finish the fight when I could." Tails replied, battle aura dying down. "I wasn't going to have you pay for my mistake."

"You'd have died to protect your friend?" Tien asked.

"Wouldn't you do the same?" Tails looked down at Chiaotsu. Then he looked back up at Tien and his battle aura lit off again. "Yes, I was terrified, yes I thought I was going to die, but I meant what I said. Part of me wants to continue the fight, prove to that part of me that I can beat you, hurt you just as badly, so that I don't have to be scared of you any more!"

He almost shouted the last few words, then he slumped, and his battle aura winked out. "But if I did that, I would be showing that

everything I said earlier, about fighting for the right reasons, was just talk on my part, that when I'm the one hurt I would act just the same way! I have every reason to hate you, but I will \_not\_ let you do that to me!"

His battle aura had flared up again, and he took a deep breath, calming it. "So, what's it to be? Are you going to continue to fight us for the money and the 'honour' of your master, or will you leave?"

Tien barely glanced at the unconscious boy in his arms, but Tails saw it and added. "Whatever you decide, this doesn't involve him. I swear I will not attack or try to hurt Chiaotsu unless he attacks me or Goku first. And unlike some people, I keep my promises!"

That just seemed to shame Tien more. "I... you'd let us leave? Without asking for anything at all, any oath that we wouldn't come back later? How do you know I wouldn't just sneak back later, to attack you when you're not expecting it?"

"I don't, but between Goku's ability to sense ki, and my power level detector, you wouldn't be able to sneak up on us." Goku was standing beside him like a guardian angel, and added. "Yeah, I felt you coming before, and now I know what it feels like!"

Tien looked back down at Chiaotsu, and finally up at Tails. "That won't be necessary. I swear that neither I or Chiaotsu will attack you or Goku any further. You were right, right about a lot of things. Chiaotsu and I are all each of us has left. We swore to become strong together, so no-one could ever hurt either of us again.

"You did tell me things I didn't want to hear. I convinced myself that it was worth it, whatever we had to do to get trained, become stronger. But I see now that there are some things that are too high a price to pay. You tried to help me see that, and I... I'm sorry, sorry for what I did, what I was going to do!"

"What about the contract?" Tails asked. What Tien had said seemed sincere, and he wanted to believe him, but part of him was still

cautious.

"That was between Master Tao Pai Pai and the Red Ribbon. He reneged on it when he promised not to commit evil any more, and that also means those orders he gave me to kill you are no longer valid either. He may not have meant it, but he made that oath to Goku, and as I was under his orders, I must honour it. I can keep promises too."

"Won't Master Crane have something to say about that?"

"When he finally believes that his brother is dead, he will probably rail at us for being weaklings and fools, and kick us out of the school, at the very least. But somehow I don't think the Crane school is right for me and Chiaotsu any more."

Suddenly he looked puzzled. "Wait, if you could have regenerated at any time, why were you so scared?"

Tails decided that he deserved at least some truth. "That was a trick, a magical healing item, I'd forgotten I had it until the last moment."

Goku had been watching the exchange, but not saying anything, until he reacted to this. "The Senzu bean I gave you!"

"That's right!" Tails said to the sai-jin then turned back to Tien. "So I really did think I was going to die. But that scared me less than the way you hurt me. Goku may be okay with losing his tail, but mine... " He shivered again, "They're a part of who I am, the focus of my ki powers, and taking them was the absolute worst thing you could do to me."

"If it's any comfort, I don't think many other people could do it. It took everything I had to tear them, I've torn slabs of solid rock in two with less effort! I know apologising isn't much, but it's..." suddenly Tien stopped. "... or maybe not."

He reached inside his waist band, and withdrew a palm sized scroll case from an inside pocket. He offered the scroll to Tails. "The regeneration technique. I wanted to see if I could use it to grow extra arms in combat, but you might be able to use it to re-grow a tail if something happens to one. It's in a really old script I haven't fully deciphered yet, but my notes are there too."

Tails took it, and carefully took out the scroll. It was old, and fragile, and crackled when he unrolled it. The script on it was like nothing he'd seen, but there were annotations here and there, showing a lot of care and hard work had gone into figuring it out. He was willing to give something like this away? This convinced him more than words that Tien was sincere.

He laid it gently on the sand, fully unrolled, then took out his pocket computer and a camera unit. Fortunately, the protected pockets in his boots had kept both computer and capsule case undamaged. He took a series of close up pictures of the scroll, then rolled it back up and handed it back.

"When I gave it to you, I meant for you to keep it." Tien said, but eagerly took the scroll back.

"But with both of us working on it, it will get solved faster." Tails replied. If he could use ki to regenerate major damage instantly, he might be able to avoid something like what just happened in future. Suddenly, he thought of something.

"If you need someone new to train under, you might try Master Karrin."

"But he's just a legend!" the three eyed martial artist replied.

"Uh uh!" Goku said brightly. "The old cat trained me. He's really really good!"

"You've actually met him?"

"Yep!" Goku nodded. "You just climb up the tower, and there he is at the top! He's also the one who grows the Senzu beans."

"Where can I find this tower?" Tien asked eagerly.

"In the 21st Province, the Karrin Highlands, where else?" Tails said. "Find a guy called Bora, he's the guardian of the place, and a friend of ours. Actually, he'll probably find you first. Ask to climb the tower, and say we sent you, and you shouldn't have a problem."

"Thank you... I mean it, but I don't understand why you're giving me an opportunity to get even stronger." Tien asked. "You're trusting me very quickly after what I did."

"From what Goku said, Master Karrin can do telepathy, and he wouldn't take anyone who didn't prove himself worthy. So if you aren't honest about turning over a new leaf, it's no problem. And if you are, the sooner you get training from someone like Master Karrin the better. Everybody wins, the best kind of solution."

Suddenly the white faced youngster woke up, and sprang into the air. "Huh? Don't worry Tien, I won't let him catch me again!"

"Chiaotsu! Wait!" Tien called out, and Chiaotsu stopped in mid-air, arms half outstretched.

"What?" Chiaotsu looked around him. "Where's Master Tao Pai Pai? Why are you just standing there? What's going on?"

"Goku beat him, and he surrendered, then he tried to blow us all up with a grenade, while he ran away."

"He beat Tao Pai Pai?" the white faced boy floated backwards from Goku and Tails, nervously glancing between them. "I didn't like him anyway. He was mean to me!"

"Yes, and we've come to an agreement. We're not going to continue his contract, he made the promise himself, we're going to return to

Master Crane and report his younger brother's death."

Chiaotsu cringed. "He's going to be awful mad!"

"We can face it, as long as we're together, right?" Tien held up a hand, and Chiaotsu clasped it. "Yeah!"

Tien turned back to Tails, and gave a bow of respect. "Thank you. For reminding me what a real martial artist should be, and for everything else. One day, I hope to see you again, and then, I would like a sparring match with both of you."

"Then I'm going to have to train even harder to give you a good fight." replied Tails. "Wait, you don't know if the Red Ribbon Army has hired any other assassins, do you?"

"I didn't hear of any while I was there." Tien grinned. "Actually, I think they're terrified of you. In fact, if you need any help with them..."

"I might take you up on that. I figure we've got it covered, but some extra help can't hurt. I'll send you a message via Master Karrin."

"Then it's agreed." Tien nodded. "Come on Chiaotsu, let's go."

The two of them floated up into the air, and flew off.

"We'd better be going too..." Tails said to Goku, then looked down at himself, covered in dirt, sand and other substances. "After I've had another wash and gotten a spare pair of goggles."

**Author's Notes:** Surprise! This is the real ending to the Tails of Blue Water arc. Actually, this was going to be a curb stomp back when I first planned it. In canon, Tao Pai Pai defeats Goku, but accidentally fails to kill him before he goes for training with Master Karrin. The return match is a curb stomp the other way, which ends pretty much the same way mine did.

I figured with Tails, and his ability to plan, they'd have a chance to prepare, once they knew about the threat, especially as I wrote the

arc. But I took several pieces of feed back from reviewers, and started to think. Firstly, Tails was winning everything, yes being awesome while doing it, and he came by it honestly, but I was worried it was getting formulaic.

Exploder said one of the things he liked about Tails was the way he planned for everything and that worried me. While that is one of his characteristics, I don't want him to become a Batman clone, with a gadget or solution for everything, no matter how unexpected. I wanted to show that even he could be blind-sided by the unexpected.

Also, I've been extolling his technical abilities and fighting abilities, but I don't think I've been showcasing the ability he started with, the one I feel is as key to understanding Tails as anything, his spirit, and essential decency. It's easy to be magnanimous when you're winning, but a character only truly shows his quality in adversity.

Hence adding Tien and Chiaotsu to the mix. In canon they first meet Goku and the others at the next Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, and they're still with the Crane school and as big jerks as they were here. Tien breaks Yamcha's leg after he knocks him out, but then Master Roshi tells him he could be so much more during their fight. In the final, Goku's fighting prowess impresses him so much he defies Master Crane when ordered to kill Goku, and basically has a change of heart.

I wanted a threat Tails was overpowered by, one that would end up hurting him for real, where he would have to show what he was made of when you stripped away the gadgets and support from Goku. I don't like hurting my protagonists, but it was necessary to tell the story I wanted.

Writing a curb stomp would have been easy, writing one where he gets beaten down and then comes back with a last minute heroic effort and opens up a well deserved can of whoop-ass would have been still fairly easy. But I finally decided this wasn't about the

physical fight, or even his willingness to fight on even in defeat, to protect his friends. We've seen that before.

I wanted to see how he'd react when he was hurt, wounded about as badly as it's possible to hurt him, and then had a chance to turn the tables. Despite what was done to him, he still stayed true to his principles, and that was the true fight he won, impressing Tien so much that it had the same effect as Master Roshi's argument.

I hope I made it clear that this wasn't some Dumbledorian 'get out of villainy free, I'm good so therefore I automatically forgive my enemies' shtick. Tails had to fight his own perfectly legitimate desire to strike back at the person who hurt him, and fight hard. But he was a good enough person that he didn't need a green Muppet to tell him where that path led.

It wasn't so much the threat of death, as the loss of control of his own life, the violation he felt, that was at the core of his fear and resultant anger. One of the key plot elements all the way through has been Tails having taken charge of his own life, charting his own course rather than the one other people have laid out for him.

To lose that, be thrown back to where he started, I hope people realise just what it took not to strike back at the one who did it to him. That's probably why I've rambled on so much. As usual, I'm not sure if I conveyed it effectively, so please review and tell me if I actually managed to get the point across, or if it just sounds like clichéd crud.

While this is the end of my scheduled updates, I may come back to this as my two tailed muse is still buzzing around my head. I'm not promising, but I'll try.



# Telling Tails

## Chapter 24 - Telling Tails

The Kame House came into view below Kinto'un, back on it's original small islet rather than the larger island that had been their home during their training. A short, bald figure was doing a solo kata out on the surf, while an older bearded baldy was lying up in a hammock.

"Goku! Tails!"

Kurilin looked up at the cloud and waved excitedly, before springing up in a massive ki assisted leap to meet them. Mindful of the fact that unlike Tails and Goku, he couldn't sit on the cloud for himself, Tails caught the third Turtle student, forming a platform for him to stand on with his tails.

Goku bounced around to face the martial artist monk. "Hey Kurilin!"

"They said you'd be coming, but I didn't believe it until now! It sounds like you've been having fun, beating up on the Red Ribbon Army and saving villages from destruction!"

"It was only the one village, Kurilin sensei." Tails ducked his head away.

Kurilin chuckled. "That is just the sort of thing I'd expect you to say! And there's no need to be so formal!"

Tails shook his head. "You taught me martial arts, even as Master Roshi did. You deserve the title as much as he does."

The young monk gave him a slap on the back, then wheeled his arms to keep his balance as Tails reached up and steadied him. "And I'm proud of that. Still, it sounds like now you could teach me a thing or two, so much as I like the ego boost it's just plain Kurilin."

Tails smiled, but his heart wasn't fully in it. Part of him was still back on the beach, worrying about what would have happened if he'd made a mistake. Also, while he'd been quite genuine in his attempt to help Tien change, and believed he had, there was still a part of him that remembered the rage, still felt the pain and was actually scared of seeing the three eyed martial artist again. Combined with his other worries, the result was a little fox with greatly conflicted feelings.

Goku landed the flying cloud on the shore, and all three jumped off, and there was a lot of hugs and high fives. At least here was genuine joy at seeing his friend and sensei again.

Master Roshi climbed out of his hammock and came over. "Heh heh! Good to see you two again!"

"Master Roshi!" Tails turned, brought his hands together and bowed. He was glad to see his old sensei, maybe he could help Tails sort through the confusion he was feeling.

"Hi old timer!" Goku waved.

Tails looked around for the other regular resident of the Kame House. "Where's Lunch?"

"Off shopping, unless she sneezed at the wrong time." Kurilin smirked.

"Well, it seems you two have been busy!" Master Roshi chuckled again. "Are dragon ball hunts always this lively?"

"Uh Master Roshi, how do you and Kurilin know about our run-ins with the Red Ribbon Army?"

"You've been all over the news since yesterday. It seems one of the TV stations managed to find out about your trip to Jingle village, and went to interview some people there. They even have some film of you rescuing the Mayor..."

"But I deleted all the records, so the Red Ribbon wouldn't have a chance to see who was doing it!" Tails exclaimed.

"That robot guy he adopted had a record function, and he let the news crew have a copy."

Tails thought for a moment, then shook his head. While it had been critical at the time, it wasn't a problem any longer. "I guess it's okay, the bad guys know about us now anyway. Besides, a lot's happened since then."

"Five dragon balls!" Kurilin responded. "Only two to go!"

"Okay, I know you didn't get that off the news!" Tails put his hands on his hips and glared at the monk.

"Never said we did!" Kurilin grinned. "But you're not the only visitors we've had today..."

A blue haired girl stepped out, and Tails bounded over to hug her.

"Bulma!" Over the months when he'd been commuting to Capsule Corps, she'd become almost as important to him as Aunt Bunnie, though she was more like across between Sally and Rotor.

She ruffled his fringe. "Hi there, Tails! Can't keep out of trouble, can you?"

His tails drooped. She'd told him to be careful several times before he'd set off. "I'm sorry, it isn't like I'm looking for it, it just happens to be there when I arrive."

That made her drop down on a knee and cuddle him. "Oh Tails, I'm just kidding! Even if it did scare me out of a year's growth when I heard you were up against the Red Ribbon Army! And I was so worried when you just dropped out of sight for a whole week!"

That made him feel a bit more guilty. "I'm sorry, but it was supposed to fool them, not anyone else. I didn't contact you because I didn't

want to attract their attention. They have spies watching Capsule Corps, they're even trying to get one into the advanced materials team."

That surprised her. "I'll ask dad to tell the right people. How do you know that?"

"We got a chance to spy on them. We'd been hitting one base after another, as fast as we could, and I figured a change of pace would mix them up. Besides, I needed the time to build a submarine, and Goku had to go train at Karin tower in case Tao Pai Pai showed up."

Each of them reacted to that in their own way. "Submarine?" asked Bulma, "Karin Tower?" asked Master Roshi, while Kurilin asked "Tao Pai Pai?"

"I would like to hear about this too." A fourth person stepped out from the Kame House, a guy with a pencil moustache and a neat uniform. Goku went into a stance, ready to fight, but Tails called out, "No! Goku, he's on our side... or we're on his... he's a Colonel in Military Intelligence, probably the guy who's been picking up the Red Ribbon goons to take them to jail."

"Colonel Motoki." The man gave a polite nod. "I've been looking forward to meeting you both. "Though you seem singularly well informed for someone who's first message was to the police to deal with bad men, Mr Prower"

Tails disentangled himself from Bulma, and put one hand to the back of his head, looking slightly embarrassed. "Well, I had a chance to go to the library since then. I was researching the submarine the Red Ribbon guys were using, and found a couple of other books on the military. One showed a table of rank badges and uniforms. How did you know we were going to be here, anyway?"

The soldier nodded towards the blue haired girl. "Miss Bulma had a prototype of her dragon ball detector. When we responded to your latest beacon, I brought her along. We saw the way the dragon ball

was moving and my men dropped me off here before heading on to Blue base."

"I guess that makes sense. Have you had any problems? I disabled their anti-air capability and we managed to confine them. There's also a second beacon on the submarine, it's dead in the water but it still has its complement of torpedoes, and a deck gun." Tails wanted to be sure that he hadn't missed anything.

"Two naval destroyers are homing in on it, with anti-submarine air cover, and I had a report from my force at the base that they've managed to take the prisoners there into custody with a minimum of disturbance. However, we have yet to find General Blue..."

Goku piped up. "He kinda blew up! Well he was trying to blow us up, but he blew himself up instead. So did Tao Pai Pai, though that wasn't in the pirate cave..."

"Man, now I really wish I'd been with you!" Kurilin exclaimed, "I'd heard there were pirates around here once! They say there's still a vast treasure that was never found. If you found their lair, maybe we could go looking for it sometime."

Tails shook his head. "It wouldn't do any good. The entire complex was destroyed when General Blue used his bomb. And I would have loved to examine that old fashioned submarine, and the combat robot."

The young monk slumped. "Then I guess it's lost forever..."

Tails chuckled. Kurilin was usually the prankster of the group, but he'd set himself up for this one. "Well I wouldn't say that. While we were hunting for the dragon ball, we stumbled across an old chest..."

He pulled out his capsule case, and popped a particular ration crate. He opened the lid of the chest inside, and stood back. The gold and gems sparkled even more brilliantly in the bright sunlight than they had in the lights of the pirate base.

"Whoa!" Kurilin's eyes gleamed. "There must be enough stuff in there to buy just about anything."

Tails shrugged. "I just collected it because it might be useful. It was a pain trying to build a submarine without any money. Now I don't have to give the parts back, I can pay a fair price, and if I need anything else, I can buy that too. Of course half of it is Goku's."

"Except for the share which the government will want." Colonel Motoki said.

"Huh? Why would they want a share?" Tails asked. "We found it."

"Bulma filled me in on your history, so you might not understand the concept, but have you heard of taxes?"

"Oh, yeah, it's not something we had in Knothole, but I read up on the Kingdom of Acorn before Robotnik's takeover."

Goku still looked confused. "What's he talking about?"

"Everyone pays a bit of what they have to the government, and the government uses it to fund projects for the public good, and services like the police and the army. Considering how much help they've been taking care of the Red Ribbon guys..."

The Colonel nodded. "If it were stolen recently, it would be taken to the police who would try to return it to its original owners."

Tails' eyes widened, and his tails drooped again. "I hadn't thought of that! It was stolen, so I guess that's only fair."

"You 'd probably receive a finders fee, quite a big one, so you wouldn't go away empty handed." The Colonel reassured him. "However, if that treasure is more than eighty years old, which I'm betting it is from the stories, it falls under treasure trove laws. A contractor working on expanding a base in my district found a much smaller one, so I do know something about this."

"The government will have it valued, and buy it off you at eighty percent of the market price. The other twenty it keeps as a tax. But the good news is it's then free and clear. And from the size of that chest and some of those diamonds, even eighty percent would be easily enough to set you both up for several lifetimes of foolish spending."

Tails looked back at the chest, then re-capsulised the crate. "I would like to keep some of the nicer pieces of jewellery..."

Kurilin chuckled. "I didn't think you were the clothes horse type!"

"Not for me, for Aunt Sally, and Aunt Bunnie. Aunt Bunnie has always been so kind to me, and Sally is a princess, after all, and I'd like her to have the chance to feel like one, for once..." he suddenly turned to Bulma. "Oh gosh! I'm sorry, you've been so good to me, you should have a chance to pick something too, I didn't mean to miss you out."

Bulma waved it away. "It's okay, I'm a rich man's daughter, and I'd rather have a welding torch than another tiara anyway. Besides..." She put her hand on one hip and posed. "I look good in anything!"

She added, "Though I'd like to see this submarine you built. Why didn't you come to West City? I could have hooked you up with something."

Tails pulled out the Sea Fox capsule and activated it. "The Red Ribbon have spies on Capsule Corps, remember? I didn't want to draw their attention to you, or give them a timetable when I left. So I found a junk-yard and worked there to get parts and access to their machine shop."

Bulma was examining his workmanship. "This is a very nice piece of work... Wait! How did you manage that?"

"They had a back-log of machines that needed fixing." Tails stated. "Fortunately, Mr Lee Kei was willing to accept me on my abilities, not

my age."

Bulma frowned. "That's still child labour! He shouldn't have taken advantage of you!"

Tails shook his head. "Oh no! If anyone was taken advantage of, it was him. I around 10000 zeni left, and some of the parts in the Sea Fox cost far more than a week worth of work, not to mention the time he spent helping me put it together. He was very insistent that it wouldn't leave the yard unless it was thoroughly tested and safe.

"I had a capsule house I salvaged from Outpost Silver, and enough money for food, but I couldn't have gotten the Sea Fox built without his help. He and the yard workers really took good care of me. I'm really glad I'll be able to pay him in full for all the parts I used."

The blue haired wrench wench was slightly mollified, but asked rather plaintively, "Why didn't you come to me, I could have hooked you up with something, or helped you build it?"

"The spies on Capsule Corps, remember? If they'd found out I was building a submarine, and they could have spotted me leaving, they'd have known exactly where I was going next. My only chance was to build it somewhere with no previous association to me or Goku. I think I did a decent job, considering the limited resources I had to work with." He pulled out the battered pocket computer Bulma had once given him, and started showing her schematics.

"Whoa, before you two get into techie talk, you and Goku have got to tell us the full story!" Kurilin exclaimed.

The recounting of their adventures took some time. Lunch had obviously sneezed, since she didn't return, but dinner was eventually made by Tails, the only other cook in the group. But it was only afterwards that they finally got to the events of that afternoon.

"That idiot Crane! So he's trying to poison the minds of another generation?" Master Roshi fumed. "I knew his younger brother was



Tao Pai Pai, but to hire his students out like common street thugs?"

"I don't think they were getting paid anything." Tails responded.

The old martial arts master sighed. "I remember how things stood between those two, even the chance to hurt me by killing my students wouldn't have been enough for him if there was a chance that he could squeeze his brother for some money as well, though I don't doubt that his students wouldn't have seen a zeni of it, the flint hearted old duffer!

"Not that I have much time for those two anyway after the way they defeated you. A fight, even a duel to the death is one thing, but crippling a downed opponent for the sake of hurting him, that is not the act of a martial artist."

"I'm more interested in this claim that Tao Pai Pai is dead." Colonel Motoki said. "There's a ten million zeni reward for his capture, dead or alive. It's a pity you don't have any kind of proof."

Goku shrugged. "There wasn't anything left of him."

"Well Goku beat him, as I knew he would and while I'm sorry we couldn't bring him in alive, at least he won't hurt anyone else." Tails said, then added, "I'm sorry that I failed the school."

"In what way, Tails my boy?" Master Roshi asked, a second ahead of Kurilin.

"When we went our separate ways at the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, we all promised to continue training. Goku may have won his fight, but I lost mine. I should have trained harder."

Kurilin exclaimed. "You fought a guy who sounds scary powerful at a two to one disadvantage, and even when he had you down, you kept on fighting purely to give Goku time."

"Not only that, you appear to have convinced them away from turning into something like Tao Pai Pai, or a hate filled old bustard like Crane." Master Roshi added. "You may have lost the fight, but I count that as winning the battle."

"That... that isn't all." Tails added. "I had a chance to win the fight outright, but the only way would have meant using a lethal version of the Tailspin attack. I held back because I was sure there was good there, that there was another way."

Goku replied. "And you were right! He said he was sorry and everything!"

"But what if I'd been wrong?" Tails let loose the fears he'd felt during the darkest part of that last fight. "What if I'd been looking for something that wasn't there? I risked your life as well. What happens if the next time I hesitate, and someone innocent dies, or if I make a mistake and kill where I don't need to?"

That silenced everyone, until Colonel Motoki spoke. "That sounds like a question for a soldier, not a martial artist. You shouldn't have to even ask it at your age, but I'm not going to hide behind that. Miss Briefs told me your history, and I understand why you chose to do this, so I'll try to answer. However, the answer is, well there isn't an easy answer.

"You do your very best to make sure you don't make a mistake, but if you do, you have to live with it. It's the one thing they can't teach you in basic training, or even officers candidate school. It's something I hope you never have to deal with, but about the only comfort I can give is that it is possible. It's another form of courage, which you and Son Goku seem to have plenty of.

"I was in charge of the Red Ribbon investigation before you and Goku showed up, and I did everything I could to stop them, but with their ability to strike wherever they wanted, and their spies in the military, we were reduced to chasing around cleaning up their messes. I did everything I could, but every incident I felt like I'd failed

the people I wasn't able to protect. But I kept at it, hoping for a break, which you two finally gave me.

"And that's the thing you have to tell yourself. If you did nothing, you wouldn't be at risk of making a mistake. But that would be a mistake in itself, wouldn't it? That is how you find the courage to risk yourself, and how you'll find the courage to risk making a mistake, or to live with it afterwards and carry on, because you can't walk away."

Tails thought about what the Colonel had said. "I've been stupid again, haven't I?"

The Colonel shook his head. "No, just frightfully young and inexperienced, and I don't mean that slightly. Time will rectify both of those, not that that's entirely a fortunate thing. At least your willing to ask and listen to the answers, something I could do of more with from people several times your age."

He turned to the group. "I didn't just come here to meet these two, and thank them for their help, though I am grateful, for everything they've both done so far. I had other reasons, though neither of them are 'official'. Indeed, one of them plays fast and loose with the chain of command, but I sincerely believe that I'm doing my best to fulfil the spirit of the oath I took when I became a soldier."

"I'll cover the less problematic one first. What happens after you use the dragon balls and go on your way? It's not something I've put in my reports for obvious reasons, but the idea that there are these items that allow you to do just about anything, and they'll reappear every year is terrifying.

"Worse still, there is now an easy way to detect them, and that fact is known. As well as your group and the Red Ribbon Army, there's this Emperor Pilaf character, who we'll have to investigate. It's my job to protect people, but how can I do that if any lunatic with one of these radars can collect these dragon balls and wish them into slavery?"

He sighed. "Unfortunately, I can't suppress the secret, not without the kind of slaughter that I couldn't countenance, even if I had the power to organise it. So I've been doing my best to obscure it. I need you to destroy all the plans and radars you have. Miss Bulma, I know you can build more, and I can't compel you, but I will ask you not to. Mr Prower, since you'll be leaving, that shouldn't be a problem.

"I've been working to put together more of a layered defence. The official reports will say that you and the Red Ribbon Army were after the only sources of a rare substance that could have been used to build a powerful weapon, but which Mr Prower used to power his trip home. I assume between the two of you, you can come up with suitable techno-babble to cover it?"

Tails looked over at Bulma, then they both nodded. Bulma added. "My dad can help too, he may be a goof-ball most of the time, but he comes through when needed."

Kurilin asked. "But what about the people who know about the dragon balls, and the guys in the Red Ribbon Army, or this Pilaf guy?"

"Pilaf I can get put under observation, if he tries anything we should be able to stomp on him. As for telling others, can you really see him creating rivals for himself? As for the Red Ribbon, considering the quality of soldier they have, it's unlikely the full secret, or even part of it was spread at all far. I can guarantee anyone who does know it is going to go away for a long time, at the very least."

"So I've got a containment strategy, but there are the people you've told on your travels, though I've managed to get them to promise not to spread the story any further. You've built up a considerable amount of goodwill among your acquaintances, and I'm afraid I traded on it rather ruthlessly. You really didn't have a good idea of operational security when you started this, Mr Prower."

Tails looked down at the ground. "I'm sorry, I wasn't really thinking about the big picture. It all just seemed like some big treasure hunt."

"Fortunately, you didn't spill that much beyond the existence of the dragon balls, and their purpose. So we can spread some disinformation. I hope you will let me know about anyone you've missed, and after you've gone, your friends can let it be known that the balls recharge themselves once a century, not once a year.

"That should discourage any opportunists from pursuing them. As for Pilaf, if we can find an information channel of his, we can let him discover the same thing, maybe that this dragon that's summoned told you..."

Tails spoke up, eyes bright. "I know, we can say it's because they were used twice only a year apart, the high usage meant there wasn't enough time for them to recharge fully, and the effect I wanted was really powerful. It didn't just drain them, it damaged them, so they have to repair themselves!"

"That should work." The Colonel nodded approvingly. "I should be able to finesse it, if I get the necessary co-operation from each of you. I have managed to get at least a basic work-up on each of you, and I believe you are all honourable people."

The others grouped around the table quickly agreed, and Colonel Motoki sighed with relief.

"The other matter is less important in the grand scheme of things, but more immediate. It is also not something I should be discussing, but I can see no other way to see what may be done. The army is planning to attack Red Ribbon Headquarters in three days time.

"Unfortunately, it's gotten political, and an operation of this size can't be commanded by a mere staff Colonel in intelligence, a newly promoted one at that, anyway. The safest option would be to stand off and bombard the place, but we need their records intact to break their networks of spies and informants, so it's been decided to engage in a full scale frontal assault."

Tails winced. "They've been planning for exactly that, building up their defences massively! You can't let them do it, your soldiers will be slaughtered!"

"General Gun believes that casualties, while regrettable, are an inevitable side-effect of such an operation. He's putting together a force that should be able to win despite it. It helps that he's high enough up the chain of command that he's not the one who'll be writing the 'we regret to inform you' letters to the families." The Colonel's expression gave ample evidence of his feelings about General Gun.

"Don't get me wrong, one of the hardest jobs of an officer is to send men under your command into combat, knowing some of them won't make it back, especially if you can't be with them. But it is your duty, something you may have to remember yourself one day. However, it's also your duty not to waste that loyalty, to make every effort to minimise your casualties, and to make any lives lost mean something, not sacrifice them needlessly."

"General Gun has forgotten that. He is more of a political animal than a combat soldier, inevitable as we've been at peace so long. He was put in place by factions within the army who want to be seen to be doing something, who want the credit for the destruction of the Red Ribbon Army to be clearly the army's. He has little use for clever tactics or 'fancification', and has convinced himself that the mere sight of his massive force will cause the Red Ribbon to run screaming."

"I've been told to assist him with intelligence, and have provided what I can, but with no-one on the inside, I can only give him what I've gotten out of prisoners, and that doesn't include the latest upgrades. I have hints that they're scaling up, but nothing solid. General Gun doesn't have much use for intelligence either, or for me, as he feels I've been 'hogging the glory'. So he refuses to believe they're getting ready to make a fight of it."

"Which comes to why I've contacted you. I assume you had your own plans for an assault on Red Ribbon HQ?"

"We were just going to bust in there, get the dragon balls, and beat them all up." said Goku.

Tails shook his head. "While that was the general idea, I had thought a bit more about the details. I've been working on some things since Muscle Tower, and I think they could help you too."

"When we were in Muscle Tower, I had a chance to examine their computer systems, they're using a bootleg version of Cap OS 7.5, which means they haven't applied any of the service packs. I later confirmed at Outpost Silver and Blue base that all their computer systems did. Of course, that means they're using Cap Soft Process Control language as their hardware control interface. Except for their autonomous robots, but they were using a custom architecture I didn't have time to learn about."

"And this means?" The Colonel asked.

"I took a chance. I wrote a virus that exploits a weakness in the system architecture. User permissions to be precise. It uploaded itself when they took the last data download, and created a super-user account. Then it set the view permissions so that only the account itself could see it, and included deleting the log of it's creation and renumbering the logged commands.

"The beauty of it is the virus was a one time thing that only operated for a fraction of a second, so unless they had a virus scanner active at the time, they wouldn't know it was there. And they didn't."

"How can you be sure of that?" asked Bulma.

"Because it created a copy, hidden under the super-user ownership, in every system it contacted. When I was at Blue base, I checked and the user account was there. Now when I started this, I just did it

because I thought it would be useful to spy on them, gather information.

"If the HQ system is anything like the others, the security cameras and comms systems tie into it. Later we found out that because the capture of their field forces left them short of men, most of the defences are automated and hooked into the central computer. Which means as a super-user, with the right sort of terminal I can access them all."

The Colonel asked. "And you have the right kind of terminal?"

"No." The young fox stated. "But I can build one."

"We can build one." Bulma added. "But once you start using your user access, any other super-user can find it and lock it out."

"Not if I create a script that creates a duplicate file structure with stubs for each action file, and transfer all other users to the duplicate structure, and hide the original."

"So it will look to them that everything's in order, but when they try to do anything, nothing will happen! I like it!" Bulma giggled. "Meanwhile, we can play big band music over their PA, and watch as Goku flattens them."

Tails thought for a moment. "Actually, if you were willing to run the system, I could go in alongside Goku. Colonel Motoki has already been using you as an intelligence resource, so it would be far easier for him to introduce you as a tech expert, since you'd have to co-ordinate with this general anyway."

"Decimating their defences would help a lot, and having access to their command and control systems would help even more." The Colonel said. "But are you sure you can maintain it?"

"Not indefinitely." Bulma said. "Ultimately they could shut down everything and re-install the OS, and everything on top of it,



assuming they have a clean back-up but that will take them time from when they figure out how badly compromised their system is. And it will be down the whole time. And unless they figure out how Tails did it, I'll just do it to them all over again."

Tails was thinking. "Goku and I will go in ahead of your main force, cause even more disruption, wreck the manned defences and see if we can't get some of them to desert. According to Tien their morale is already pretty poor. Actually, it was pretty much we had planned already. Tien offered to help, and I'm sure Chiaotsu will follow his lead."

"But he attacked you!" Bulma replied. "He could just be setting you up!"

"I don't think he is..." Tails looked away from her line of sight, "... though I can't be completely sure. Part of me remembers how he hurt me, and says not to trust him, but I can't let that fear control me. Two things I am sure of, that Goku and I could defeat him and Chiaotsu in a pinch, and that if he is still fighting for the Red Ribbon, or Master Crane, I'd rather know where he is than leave him floating. I know it's a risk, but the gains outweigh it. If Goku agrees with me, I'll get them in on it."

Goku slapped him on the shoulder. "He did say he was sorry, and he offered you that scroll too. I want to see him fight, so if you say it's okay, I do too."

"Hey, I want in!" Kurilin piped up. "I should have been there to help before, and you two are not chasing off into danger again without me!"

"Yeah! The Turtle Trio is back in action!" Goku exclaimed.

"Thanks Kurilin." Tails said happily. "Though you'll have to practice being bullet-proof."

"Bullet proof?" The monk gulped, and began to wonder if this had been the smart thing to do.

Tails was already thinking of something else. "We need some detailed plans of the fortress, but I don't think the probe I used for Blue base will get through the kind of security they have. However, I know someone who can. Goku, could you call Kinto'un?"

Colonel Motoki had seen the flying cloud several times, but watching Tails give it instructions and it responding took it to a whole new level of strangeness.

"... overfly it only in the direction of the prevailing wind, and only at the speed of the other clouds." Tails had a capsule chest open, and had the probe robot out, tinkering with it to add a pull cord switch. "As far as they're concerned, you be just another cloud, floating overhead. And stay safe, it's more important that you get back than that you record everything."

The cloud flew off, carrying the probe inside it, and Tails turned back to the others. "That should give us some actual layouts to work from. I have a couple of other ideas we could use..."

**Author's Notes:** This was going to be a short filler chapter. But then I felt there was too much talking, and not enough feeling. Tails had to be affected by what happened last chapter. I can't believe he'd just shake it off and go on as usual. So I started adding some stuff to relay that, and to my surprise, it was Motoki who answered his concerns, rather than Master Roshi.

Then I thought of one thing after another that needed to be resolved, and the thing just grew. Thanks for sticking with it everyone. The next chapter will be storming RRHQ, and it's hopefully going to be epic. I hope everyone enjoys it.

# War Tails Part 1

## Chapter 25 - War Tails Part 1

General Gun was a heavy-set human with dark hair just starting to be tinged with silver. His wide face and heavy jowls reminded people of a bull-dog, even other bull-dogs. He had parleyed that into a reputation for tenacity and fierceness, which he had demonstrated frequently in the no-holds barred political in-fighting in the army bureaucracy.

This had rather obscured the fact that he'd never actually heard a gun go off in anger. He'd gone directly into from a private military academy into officer training, and then by careful use of his many family contacts, right into an executive position in an army garrison, which had placed him perfectly to take over when the old commander retired. From there it was onwards and upwards, and this would prove to be his most glorious hour.

Around him aides and operation officers went about their tasks with quiet efficiency. He examined the mosaic photo map laid out on the table in his command post. At least that intelligence type, Mockery, or whatever his name was, had come through with something useful.

The Red Ribbon base was huge, with a rectangular layout and surrounded by a fifteen foot high curtain wall. It had circular towers topped with cone shaped roofs set along it at intervals, each manned and mounting heavy machine guns, facing both in and out. These were supplemented by dozens of additional, pylon mounted gun turrets set up just inside the perimeter wall, though these looked to not be manned.

Outside there was a wide concrete apron, and the woods had been cleared back even further, giving a clear field of fire of a couple of hundred feet. The main gate was set in the middle of one of the shorter sides, and the first third of the rectangle behind it was a large

complex of domes, block houses and towers. Additional weapons platforms studded the complex, covering every aspect.

Straddling the centre were three big half cylinder structures that had to be hangars. This was easily deduced from the fact that they faced out onto an open area that held a complex of runways, which took up most of the remainder of the interior. At the other end, built into one corner was a smaller complex around a high tower studded with antennae, obviously their air traffic control.

The photos were wonderfully clear, he could even see individual guards captured patrolling the walkways and parapets. Though it did also show some disturbing things, the number of air-strips and visible turrets proved it was quite heavily defended, more so than his initial force plan had imagined.

Still, fighting power was only as good as the men behind it, and how much of it was even manned? With the capture of most of their expeditionary forces, there was no way they could support this level of defences. They had to know they were in a hopeless position. He had the area surrounded at beyond their effective air-defence perimeter, a 'Ring of Steel', he'd called it in his planning sessions at HQ.

If they tried an air-attack on his strong-points they'd lose every vehicle they sent, even those infernally numerous VTOL craft they seemed to spawn. It was those, along with their Archer SAM launchers that had managed to discourage any large scale air attacks on the place, or even reconnaissance drone over-flights. Which begged the question of how Mockery had gotten this data.

Given his druthers, he would simply have sat there and besieged them, but Command wanted their records intact, and the Red Ribbon decisively defeated, and the only way to accomplish that was to hit them hard and hit them fast, which would happen in under an hour. The air-force would start the attack with a mass strike that would target the weapons hard-points and hangars and suppress any other targets of opportunity.

Two entire squadrons of bombers armed with laser guided air-to-ground missiles would take part in the attack, supported by three squadrons of fighters. With that many air-craft going in, even their defences would be overwhelmed. That would clear the way for transports to drop two companies of paratroopers on their heads.

With luck, the shock would make the remnants of the Red Ribbon roll over, but if they still had some fight in them, the paratroopers would simply secure routes of entry and prevent breakouts until his main ground force came in to relieve them. He would start that force on its way even as the bombers flew overhead, the heavy woods made it impossible to attack on a broad front, but three battalions of motorised infantry supported by light tanks and VTOL air-support should settle their hash.

"So General, are you confident that your battle-plan will succeed?"

Oh yes, to make sure the army got the recognition for this, a news crew from ZTV had been allowed in to interview him and follow the attack from his command post as it went in. Obviously, it was being taped for later broadcast, so if the Red Ribbon had cable they wouldn't be getting any tactical information. Plus, he could ensure the report that did go out was the most... effective possible.

He turned to the reporter, a blonde wolfhound, making sure to show his best side and putting on a serious, thoughtful expression.

"Absolutely, Miss O'Shea. As you can see, we have detailed information on the remnants of the Red Ribbon Army, and we have assembled sufficient forces to crush them utterly. When the sun sets this day, it will set on a world where the Red Ribbon Army no longer exists."

"And what have you to say about the assistance you've received from the two Tenka'ichi Budo'kai winners, Son Goku and Miles Prower?"

He managed to avoid wincing. "I'm not at liberty to discuss that, other than to say that private individuals, no matter how talented, or

lucky, should leave the work of protecting the people up to the professionals. A loose canon can undo months of painstaking planning and investigation."

"So there was already a plan to move against the Red Ribbon Army?" She pressed. Rochelle O'Shea was one of ZTV's top action reporters, and not afraid to ask the hard questions.

"Unfortunately I can't discuss the details, operational security you understand?" He thought about it for a moment. "There were resources involved which we may want to use again."

"I see..."

At that moment he was relieved to see someone enter the tent, then unrelieved as he realised who it was. Damn that upstart Colonel! Probably wanted to share in the screen time. Oh well, it wasn't like he could contribute much, this was now an active operation, not an investigation. He returned the other's salute.

"Colonel? Did you want something? I am very busy at the moment..." He waved his hand around the command post and hoped the busy-body would take the hint.

"Actually, sir, I have something for you..." Colonel Motoki replied.

The General nodded. As he thought a last minute attention grab. "It's a bit late to be bringing in new information. The battle plan has been finalised."

"This will not interfere, sir, it's in the nature of a force multiplier."

He wanted to dismiss this idiot out of hand, but he was aware of the film crew still at work, and he couldn't without looking foolish. "I fail to see what you could mean, but go ahead, Colonel."

"Yes, sir!" He went to the tent flap, and brought in a civilian, some blue haired female, who was in her teens, and only barely in a figure-

hugging top and shorts. She had a couple of guards trailing her, but that didn't do much to reduce the General's ire.

"What is this!" The General exploded. "You had better have an excellent explanation for why you've allowed a civilian on to a secure military encampment!"

There was an interjection from an unexpected source. "Considering that that is Bulma Briefs, the daughter and heiress of the founder of Capsule Corps, I'd be very interested in finding that out myself, Colonel..."

"Motoki. Colonel in Intelligence 21st Province. Currently assigned to the Red Ribbon Army investigation." The colonel answered the blond canine reporter. "And Miss Briefs is here as a specialist consultant on the Red Ribbon Army's computer system."

"This is ridiculous!" The General spluttered. "We haven't even taken the base, let alone accessed their computers, and I find it hard to believe that you don't have sufficiently skilled technicians under your command to acquire the data we need."

Colonel Motoki smiled. "Indeed sir, but Miss Briefs is one of only two people trained to operate the equipment she is carrying. When set up, it will effectively give control of their entire command and control network to you."

"What?" This little revelation left the General utterly nonplussed, and the reporter dove into the gap.

"The general was telling us of 'resources' that had been in use for some time to plan an assault against the Red Ribbon Army, but that he wasn't at liberty to reveal them. Is Miss Briefs one of them?"

"Obviously, as the General stated, I can't reveal anything about our long term intelligence sources, but I can inform you that Miss Briefs is not one of them. She is purely here as a technical consultant."

O'Shea turned to Bulma. She remembered another fact about the blue haired girl, one which tied in neatly with her other information. "Miss Briefs, can you tell us how you came to be able to act as a 'technical consultant' in this matter? Would it have anything to do with a fox by the name of Miles Prower?"

Bulma grinned. If she was worried about being interviewed, she wasn't showing it. "He prefers Tails, and he did write the virus that grants access to their system, and managed to deliver it to their main base via the computer system in Muscle Tower. He designed the interface from reverse engineering their computers in the other bases he and Goku knocked over..."

The general interfered with the flow of information with a loud harumph. "This is all very well, but this is an army operation, and I don't think it's safe to put soldier's lives at risk by using some untested contraption built by a nine year old."

Bulma sniffed dismissively. "Tails had his tenth birthday over a month ago, which reminds me, we need to set up a birthday party for him. I helped build this device, and I guarantee it will work, because I tested it earlier!"

Colonel Motoki decided to step in, as the general's face was starting to go worrying colours. "Miss Briefs activated the device, and used it to access the technical schematics for their base. We have full internal lay-outs, and she assures me she was in and out without them noticing.

"The results allow me to confirm something you asked about. While the loss of their field forces have left them low on man-power, they have compensated by building up their base with a massive number of automated defence turrets, both ground and anti-air."

He laid out a second map, a single sheet with a printout of schematic on it, over the photo-mosaic. The perimeter was endemic with red circles, as if some map specific virus had infected it, and the various buildings had their own diseased spots. They matched the gun



turrets he'd assumed were unmanned. It looked like every interior courtyard was covered, as well as the approaches.

"The red dots are automated turrets. As you can see they have massively overlapping fields of fire. There are even anti-armour turrets quite capable of wrecking tanks, and at least twenty SAM launchers, capable of being directed from the central base radar system as well as having their own radar tracking systems, not to mention the heat seekers. And then there are the mine fields."

"Mine fields?" General Gun blanched. He hadn't even considered the possibility.

Colonel Motoki covered that as well. "Electronically controlled ones covering the road and other approaches, and regular ones in the cleared back areas beyond the outer concrete apron."

The general was thinking furiously. When the then Major had brought his initial reports from prisoner interviews he'd basically ignored his suggestions that the Red Ribbon intended to make more than a token fight of it. Admittedly it had been all inference and deduction rather than solid evidence, so he'd covered himself by asking for more solid data. But looking at this... If he'd sent in the force he'd intended into this, it would suffer massive casualties.

Any positive publicity generated by the defeat of the Red Ribbon Army would be wiped away by such a disaster, and now he had solid proof, caught on camera no less, his personal reputation would be hammered, unless he stopped the attack, or the Colonel came through with something... which was probably exactly why he'd pulled this stunt now. Very well, he was not going to try and defend a hopeless position. Time to withdraw in good order and fight what rear-guard action he could.

"Very well, you are sure of this analysis? It would have been more useful if you'd managed to provide this level of detail earlier." Having done his best to make sure he didn't look like a complete idiot, he let the Colonel have his moment in the sun. "You said something about

getting me access to their control systems... does that include these guns and mine fields?"

Colonel Motoki allowed no part of the pleasure he felt at having outflanked the General show, and simply said, "In short, yes. If you will let Miss Briefs set up her equipment, she will give you an overview of it's capabilities."

Getting approval, Bulma popped a capsule in an unoccupied corner of the tent, releasing a comfy swivel chair and a large console. It was made up of a number of old TVs and monitors, mounted in a rack over a jumble of wired together boxes, batteries and gadgetry. A shelf with keyboard and trackball on it stuck out from the rack. The whole thing had a hay-wired appearance in comparison to the neat military consoles around the rest of the tent.

An antenna raised itself, and the screens flickered into life. Most of them just showed a twin tail logo on a light blue background, but the bottom centre one just showed a text window and a prompt. Bulma dropped into the chair and started typing rapidly. "For the moment we're just looking in. I'm logging in as a hidden super-user, so as long as I keep my actions to accessing low priority files and applications, I'm under their radar. When I start editing and moving files and applications the balloon will go up."

The text screen showed a hidden user name and password, and 'Negotiating with Host...' with a percentage that kept going up. At 100%, the other screens lit up with security camera displays, radar screens and schematics.

"But since the first thing I'll do then is create a duplicate dummy file structure and transfer every other user to it, they won't be able to do anything about it. Or rather I'll load the script Tails wrote that will do it for me, since \_he\_ was the one who managed to examine their system in detail.

She was typing in more commands, and the displays started changing around. "At that point the only thing they'll be able to do is

shut down the whole system and re-install from scratch But that will take hours, even if they figure out what's wrong. And by that time, you'll be knocking on the door of their computer room with a tank battalion or something."

"In the mean time, you've got it all. Want to see their security camera feeds?" She typed a command and one of the screens to the side of the text one lit up with a familiar schematic. She moved a cursor over areas with the track ball and screens above it lit up with pictures of the interior and exterior of the base.

"Listen in on their comms channels?" A speaker came on at another typed command. '... by order of Commander Red! Arm all mine fields! All anti-aircraft systems are to be maintained at full readiness. Additional munitions are to be delivered to towers five and seven.'

Bulma muted it, and added. "When I take control, you can send your own orders, or just play loud music. It's all set up, I just have to run the right script."

"And you wanted control of their automated defences." Another screen came up showing the same image that was on the map on General Gun's table. "When you give the word, every turret will shut down. Re-targeting them is trickier, I'd have to go into the control software for each one individually, and probably not worth it, as they can shut them down on-site fairly quickly. It's the same with their radar, I can shut it down, or even give it a case of partial blindness. But getting them to shoot at their own side would take more time.

"However, there is something good we hadn't counted on, they even centrally control the security systems for their armouries and vehicle bays. I can reset the access codes in a few seconds. A sealed door won't hold them for long, but I'm betting that having them run short of ammunition and being unable to deploy their vehicles, even for a few minutes, will help your guys out."

General Gun was impressed in spite of himself. If this gear really could do all it was supposed to, this battle had just turned into a

curb-stomp, with his boot leading it. "Can you access their protected files?"

Bulma shook her head. "I'll try, but I explored the security covering it, and it's the one part that's actually good. It's a custom job, older than the rest. Their high priority data servers aren't even connected to the rest of the system, from the way it's set up they just physically load the files they're working on across when they need them.

"The only way to get it all is to go find the data drives and recover them. However, I can tell you where they are..." She pointed to a smaller room off the main control centre. "... and it seems that has electronic locking as well, and door that would suit a bank vault. So if I change the access code for that, they're not going to be able to get in to destroy anything."

"You're going to do more than that!" General Gun exclaimed. "Since we have access to the lay-out of their base, I'm going to use it! And all the other things too!"

Mindful of the camera crew, he made sure to appear decisive. He turned to one of his aides. "Get me air-force command! And pass a message to all company commanders that I will be providing additional tactical objectives..."

Colonel Motoki and Bulma exchanged glances. They knew that at least one other group would be taking part in this fight, and the General was still in for a few surprises.

Tails finished adjusting the device he'd clamped to the tree branch. It looked out over the cleared area surrounding the Red Ribbon Army HQ, and was high enough to have an unobstructed view over the walls. He sighted along the crude scope attached to it, little more than a tube with a set of wire cross-hairs, and checked the display on his pocket computer.

An infra-red laser was sweeping across that side of the base ten thousand times a second. Every window was being hit, paying

particular attention to the tower that contained Commander Red's private office, the one he'd spied on with Pilaf's device. It was labelled Tower 12 on the schematics he'd piggy-backed off Bulma's test scans.

The eavesdropping scanner combined ideas from his original electro-binoculars, and some things he'd thought of after seeing Pilaf's design. A custom algorithm was untangling the reflected vibrations from each window, and searching for the word 'dragon-ball' being spoken.

Similar devices were set up covering the other sides of the base, and the same algorithm was 'eavesdropping' on their intercom via Bulma's terminal. He double-checked his goggles, toggling the mode to his dragon-ball radar HUD, and as expected got no response.

Commander Red had finally wised up and sealed the remaining two dragon-balls in a Faraday cage, though not before the regular army moved into place. Given the fact that Commander Red was still giving orders, and he was unlikely to let the dragon-balls go anywhere he wasn't, they must still be in there somewhere. The trick was finding them.

As he flew away from the tree and worked his way back to the clearing they were using as a staging ground, he worried about what he'd seen. This wasn't him and Goku making a surprise attack on an unsuspecting outpost, this was a fully equipped and fully on alert base. Even with Kurillin, Yamcha, Tien... he gave a little shiver, and Chiaotsu helping, this was far and away the most ambitious and dangerous mission they'd attempted.

That had been a surprise, Yamcha turning up, or maybe not so much. The ex-desert bandit was still living with Bulma, and when he'd found out that Tails and Goku were putting together a raid on the Red Ribbon HQ, he'd invited himself along. It seemed East City didn't have any martial artists that could really challenge him. After the way he'd stepped up at the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai, Tails was glad to have him.

However, did he really have the right to ask his friends, to ask any of them, to risk their lives taking down this base to root out the dragon-balls and assist the army? A case could be made that he'd done his bit to help by giving the regular army the control terminal. As for finding the dragon-balls, he could wait until the place was cleared out and do a systematic search. It would take longer, but be far safer.

He wasn't scared for himself... okay, maybe he was, but he was more worried for the others. All of them were tough enough or fast enough to ignore small arms fire, he'd tested that with some rock throwing. Unfortunately, even with the automated systems down, this place would have the highest concentration of heavy weapons of any place he'd raided, and combined with room to room fighting where they'd have less room to evade, there was a significant risk.

He was beginning to understand why Aunt Sally hadn't wanted him to go on missions, it was one thing to put your own life on the line, another to ask others to do it for you. He'd had further discussions with Colonel Motoki, and the intelligence officer had lived up to his title. While it didn't make it any easier to do, Tails at least understood what he was doing better.

He decided to lay out the plan he'd come up with, such as it was, then ask them if they wanted to go through with it. That way they could withdraw without loss of face on the basis that his plan wasn't sufficient, as he knew their martial artist pride wouldn't let them back out on the basis of risk. Not that he was any more sensible, despite the danger, by the Ancient Walkers he was going to finish what he'd started.

The five martial artists waited for him in the clearing. They were well inside General Gun's 'Ring of Steel', which had been more like a colander to a group of martial artists who move faster than the human eye could track. The group wasn't completely at ease. Yamcha had been brought up to date on things by Kurillin, and neither were quite ready to forgive and forget what Tien had done to Tails.

Kurilin brought it out in the open. "He still has nightmares you know."

The three-eyed martial artist's already grim expression tightened. "Nightmares?"

"About you ripping his tails out!" The turtle student replied angrily.

Tien glared at the shorter man. "That's the reason I'm here, to make amends! You've seen I have some Senzu beans. Do you think Master Karrin would have given me them if I hadn't changed, wasn't worthy?"

Chiaotsu had matched his friend's glare, while Goku was just looking confused. "Tails has nightmares?"

"Yeah! You may sleep like a rock, but I've heard him at night." Kurilin replied to Goku first, then turned back to Tien.

"I'm not talking about now, I'm talking about then and how Tails feels about it. He acts so grown up, you tend to forget he's a child." Kurillin spoke with all the lordly authority of someone who was only fifteen himself. "Not that what happened wouldn't give anyone nightmares."

Tien folded his arms and grimaced. "As I said, that's why I'm here in the first place, to try and make it up to him, and act as a martial artist should. If he's scared of me, why did he invite me in the first place?"

"\_Because\_ he's scared of you." Kurillin replied. "Ever since I met him, he's said often enough that he needs to be strong to help his friends, and he sees his fears as weakness. I guess he figures working with you as an ally will help him see you differently, get over that fear."

"So if he's willing to forget the past, why aren't you?" Tien asked.

"For Tails' sake, I'll try, but I just felt you ought to know. From what Tails said, I may not be able to beat you on my own, but if you aren't sincere, I won't be alone. We Turtle school trainees work together."

"Count me in too!" added Yamcha.

Before they could antagonise each other any more, the whirring of Tails' namesakes could be heard approaching. He dropped down into the clearing, and landed in front of them. He looked around at the assembled crew.

"Thanks for coming to help, everyone."

"Heh, you know I wouldn't have missed this." Kurillin grinned back. "I spent the last two days being pelted with rocks to toughen up for it."

Yamcha gave a thumbs up. "I could do with a challenge!"

Tien was more reserved. "Chiaotsu and I still owe you a debt, and I'm glad to begin repaying it by helping to defeat these fools."

Tails took a second to reply, as despite his best efforts, he was still uneasy around the three eyed martial artist. "You're the only ones here that have been inside the base, so your help should be invaluable. I haven't made my plan too detailed, because it's likely to get messy in there, but I can show you what I do have. If you'll put on these goggles..."

Tails handed out goggle headsets to the new members of his team. They were the same as his and Goku's hardware-wise, but their functions were limited to acting as a comms network, and providing images and navigational data from his computer system. He'd built them while he was working on the main console, which was currently feeding all the data Bulma was collecting to his computer, and constructing them had taken up all his remaining spare parts. Tien's even had a third monocular lens to cover his third eye.

Kurilin and Yamcha put their sets on without hesitation, while Tien and Chiaotsu took a moment to follow. Tails pulled his headset down and pulled out his computer, keying up the images he'd received and relaying the picture to the others. He started with the general base layout.



"We have two objectives, find the remaining two dragon-balls, and destroy as much of the Red Ribbon's fighting capability as possible before the regular army get there. Bulma's ready to mess with the Red Ribbon's gear via their computer system, but wherever possible, I want us to wreck their weapons the old fashioned way too.

"Commander Red has hidden the last two balls so a radar can't find them. I've set up eavesdropping via the windows and the PA, but it may come down to hunting him or Adjutant Black down and getting them to lead us to them. That means we'll probably have to fight our way through the base to the main bunker. It may be that if we can scare them badly enough with our attack, they may get the balls and try to run, but I can't count on that."

"I have some ideas about how to do it, and alternatives if the original plans don't pan out, but as I said, I'm not a general, and I'm not going to pretend to make noises like one. I figure just sticking together to start with and staying flexible will be better than trying to plan everything down to the last detail."

Kurillin grinned. "That isn't like you. You usually have everything worked out."

"There's too many variables." Tails shook his head. "Our timetable and actions are in part based around what the regular army will do, and I don't have any information on that. I know they're going to attack today, but when and how I won't know until Bulma starts cranking up the cyber attack."

He looked around the group, assessing their reactions, and decided to ask them here and now, before going into more details. "I know you're all martial artists, and that fighting these bad guys is the sort of thing you'd have done however you ended up here, but I have to say, it's going to be more dangerous than any task Goku and I have done before.

"I'm most worried about heavy weapons, especially inside the base where they'll be little room to manoeuvre. All of us can dodge or soak

small arms fire, but taking an anti-tank rocket to the face would be a different matter, at least for me. The automated defences will be down when we go in, but there will still be plenty of other threats."

He sighed heavily. "I guess, what I'm asking is, does anyone want to back out? I guess it's partly a selfish question, I feel responsible because I set this up, and I'll feel even more responsible if anything happens to anyone. I know you're all older than me, and more experienced, but that doesn't stop me from worrying."

"Were you thinking of backing out?" Tien asked, getting dirty looks from Kurillin and Yamcha, but Tails simply gave a slight nod.

"I almost convinced myself that it would be enough to wait until the fight was over, and sift through the rubble. I guess I'm still a bit scared too. However, even with the access to the Red Ribbon base computer system I gave the regular army, if they're cornered and forced into it, the Red Ribbon bad guys will have to fight, and a lot of people on both sides will die without affecting the outcome one bit."

Tien once again asked an unpalatable question. "You realise that people are going to die anyway, and that you might be the one killing them?"

The fox looked down at the ground, unable to meet the other's three eyes. "I... Yes. I don't want it to come to that, and I've got some ideas on how to get them to desert in droves instead, but if one of you is in danger, and there's no other way... I'll do what's necessary. And I'll understand if you have to do the same. But I have to believe that by acting, I'll save more lives on both sides than I would by not acting."

Goku exclaimed. "Aw! Don't get so worried. We'll go in and beat up those bad guys, get the dragon-balls and get you home. Whatever you're planning, I'm with you."

"I know the risks, and I wouldn't be here if I wasn't ready for them!" Yamcha added.

Kurillin slapped him on the shoulder. "We'll protect each other, that's what friends do."

Chiaotsu had been quiet until now, but he suddenly spoke. "Tien and I will fight!"

"Yes, we have our own reasons, as well as repaying you." Tien added.

Tails sighed. "I figured that was what everyone would say, but you understand why I had to ask. While I can't give any mathematical percentages, I am sure that if the six of us work together, our chances of success and survival are far better."

He started keying up the plans and photos of the base. "We won't be able to do anything until Bulma starts the cyber-attack on the Red Ribbon's computers, and that will be when the regular army wants it. My computer will signal when things start up, but until then, we can just sit back and get ready.

"I do have some more detailed objectives planned out, and ways we can accomplish them, but as I said, it's better to be flexible than fit them all neatly into a plan. So I'll just cover my ideas, and we'll string them together in whatever way seems best when we're on the ground."

He looked up from his computer. "And I don't claim to be the only one with good ideas, so if you think I've missed a trick, tell me! Now, see this tower on the eastern edge? It's level with the hangars and has one of the narrowest open fields of fire..."

## War Tails Part 2

### Chapter 26 - War Tails Part 2

"Our air-strike is coming in from 170 degrees. Time for you to prove you can back up your promises, Miss Briefs." General Gun stated, looming over the blue haired heiress.

"Already on it!" Bulma's hands flickered over the keyboard, typing commands on the console screen. "Oh dear, it looks like their search radar has suffered a case of partial blindness, covering 160 to 180 degrees. There's no patrol craft up covering that vector, so they shouldn't notice anything screwy."

She typed another command, and tapped the Execute key. "I've set up a more subtle malfunction in the Archer sites. We want them active until the last possible minute, because your fighters are almost certainly going to have radar-guided missiles."

General Gun frowned. "Doesn't that risk them actually launching?"

"Not if the detection threshold on the recognition system has been bumped up by a factor of a thousand... which it has. At that sensitivity, they might launch if someone holds a metal sheet a metre in front of the main antenna, maybe. But just to be sure, I'll cut the system completely before the planes reach the base. After all, just because the Red Ribbon radar watchers are getting an edited signal, it doesn't mean I am."

"... and that's why we ended up getting involved with these goons in the first place..."

The six martial artists were sat around having a picnic, courtesy of a Capsule hamper full of food provided by Tails. He had, amongst other things, introduced the group to chilli-dogs, and was just

constructing a particularly fine specimen when his computer gave an urgent beep.

He pulled down his goggles over his eyes, and toggled through various screens in his Heads Up Display. They appeared in turn as an inset screen in one corner of his field of view, as if an invisible computer monitor was hanging a few feet in front of him. They were out of his direct line of sight, but big enough to display useful information. Such as the status and commands running through Bulma's terminal.

"It looks like it's starting... That's odd... oh, I see."

Kurillin swallowed the mouthful of chilli-dog he'd been masticating. "What's up?"

"Bulma's just started the hack on the Red Ribbon computers. Their radar system has a hole in it big enough to fly a Wing Fortress through. I'm betting it'll shortly be followed by knocking out their anti-air defences... There we go!"

"Is it time for us to go too?" Goku had somehow managed to stuff two chilli-dogs whole into his mouth a fraction of a second before, but that didn't stop him speaking clearly as he bounced up off the ground.

"To get into position, anyway." Tails replied. "I'm betting they're either starting with an air-strike, shooting the place up with aeroplanes, or landing people on parachutes. We can go in just after that."

He put the chilli-dog on the pile he'd manufactured, and packed up the hamper.

Yamcha chuckled, "I didn't expect this fight to be catered. Though I've got to admit, those chilli-dog things are great!"

Goku nodded furiously enough that his hair produced a significant breeze.

Tails closed the lid with a snap, and capsulised the hamper. "Since you guys are all here to help, the least I could do was feed you. Besides, Sonic always ends a raid with a chilli-dog, he says it tastes like victory. I figured we can use all the luck we can get."

Kurillin chuckled. "If nothing else, our breath will knock out those goobers!"

Tails grabbed the chilli-dog he'd made up, and offered the plate of done dogs around the others. Then they headed towards the edge of the forest, getting up into the trees just opposite the centre of one long wall. The main entrance was to the south, and on this eastern side, the hillside was close to the perimeter and the cleared area was narrower.

There were five witch hatted masonry towers along it, each mounting heavy machine guns, and backed up by dozens of pylon mounted automated guns that poked up from behind the curtain wall., a mix of anti-personnel and anti-air weapons. Considering the hillside made it near impossible to move heavy vehicles in close, the minefield in the cleared area and the turrets made it a killing ground for infantry... and about as useful against Tails' team as a pillow fort.

"After the air-force has it's turn, I'll disable the rest of the automatic weapons, then Goku and I will fly in on the nearest tower and knock out the crew served ones. Everyone else jumps across while we work our way around the curtain wall and wreck the guns."

"Yes, you said, the towers have the manned weapons, and you want to make sure the automatic ones are permanently out of action." Kurillin responded. "You explained it all."

"Sorry, I guess I'm just a little nervous." Tails suddenly looked his age. "I want this to go right!"

Goku polished off his last chilli-dog. "It will. You've always figured this stuff right before."

"I still think we should be the ones to take the turrets." Tien said. "We can fly across too."

"Goku and I are faster in the air, and more manoeuvrable." Tails responded. "And we've run down guns before."

"And it's nothing to do with the fact that you don't want to feel like you're hiding behind others." Kurillin snorted.

"Okay, that too, but my original reason makes..." The young fox's sensitive ears picked up a distant sound. "Sounds like the good guys are coming."

Striker Leader, Wing Commander Akane 'Crimson' Daimyo, checked her echelons and the bombers following them with a glance. She wasn't happy about the mission strategy, but she'd been over-ruled. You could tell the planner was a ground pounder. Bringing in the entire force as a single mass 'to avoid defeat in detail' sounded good, but wasn't the best use of aerial forces in this terrain and situation.

If she'd had her druthers, she'd have split her force into individual squadrons, covering a separate section of the heavies. They'd have come from three different directions, and converged on the target. The smaller groups would have been able to fly closer to the ground and evade radar detection for longer. Also, when the opposing force did spot them, they'd either have to split their defences three ways, giving her forces a better chance to evade and spoof with countermeasures, or concentrate and have two untouched forces hammer them to pieces.

The last update, just before they took off, had given some far better targeting data and the claim that the enemy defences would be out of action. It was the only way this force deployment made any sense, but she still felt like an awfully big target. Still, she had tactical control, and if they were locked on by the enemy, she'd call a defence plan that would split her bombers, and as soon as they detected the incoming Archers going over to terminal guidance, the

fighters would throw out counter-measures and peel off by squadron to join up. Then they'd follow a plan much closer to hers.

Of course, the squadron on the original heading (hers) would get the worse of it, but they'd have the cover of three squadrons worth of countermeasures. It wasn't much, but it was the best she could do, and the fighters would certainly get off their own radar-guided missiles before the Archers reached them. She switched her radio to the command circuit, checking every pilot would be almost impossible in a formation this big. "Striker Lead to all squadron leads, report readiness."

"Striker Two, Lead, we're all good." Her wing, Flight Lieutenant Aoi 'Viridian' Yamane was managing the squadron while Akane handled the full formation.

"Firebat Lead, Striker Lead, on the triggers." Squadron Leader 'Stripes' Murray was a tiger, both literally and in a fur-ball, and commanded the second squadron of fighters.

"Storm Knight Lead, Striker Lead. Ready to shred some Red Ribbon rears." Squadron Leader Dim Sun 'Dumpling' Chow was anything but dim, and the couple of extra pounds the panda carried, the origin of his call-sign, did nothing to slow his reflexes in a cockpit.

"Rhino Lead, Striker Lead, got their special delivery all wrapped up." Wing Commander Hai Tatsu was the senior bomber pilot and effectively her second in command for the formation. While he had some years on her, both in age and in the service, he didn't seem to have a problem with her being picked to run the show.

"Albatross Lead, Striker Lead. Ready to light them up on your command!" Squadron Leader Yu Bin sounded awfully young, especially next to the other bomber lead, but her record, and rank showed she had the skills.

Akane flipped back a clear cover and flipped a toggle. "Okay, weapons free, people. You know the ops plan, so wait for my calls



and let's do this by the numbers. Good luck and good hunting."

There was a chorus of affirmatives on the command channel and then quiet. Akane went to watching her radar detection warning system, as well as her course. While it would pick up the regular radar, it would detect the signal of a tracking radar attempting to lock on to her jet.

They got closer and closer, and the tension got higher and higher. While she was just as happy not to be detected yet, she couldn't understand why, unless that last minute notice about them having some way into the Red Ribbon's system was accurate. Finally, it started to ping with the sound of a radar beam trying to lock on.

"Striker Lead, all fighters, pop up and loose your birds!" she called out. While it would expose the fighters to an easy lock, the Archer launchers were currently big bright targets for their radar guided missiles. Once again she didn't expect verbal acknowledgements from a formation this size, but their action spoke loudly enough.

Akane herself angled upwards and then down, triggering the two air-to-ground missiles on her outer pylons as soon as they showed on her HUD that they had the signal. They weren't the only ones, a massed salvo of missiles shot forth with them. Even if the intel was right, and there were over twenty launchers, seventy two missiles should be enough to cover them all. There was no way to co-ordinate targets, so but the chances of any launcher getting nothing were infinitesimal.

Of course, that wouldn't stop them getting at least one salvo of their own off, before they were destroyed. "Striker Lead. All planes be ready for evasion pattern on my mark..."

She waited for the hunting bleeps to become a solid tone, and waited, and waited. What was wrong with the idiots? Her formation was almost in visual range and the radars still hadn't locked on! If they didn't launch in the next few seconds... The bleeps vanished as

she saw the base ahead, and a flare of explosions as the missiles her command had loosed plunked straight into every missile site.

Akane's estimate of General Gun went up a considerable amount. So that sneaky son of a... so and so \_knew\_ his techie types would be able to take down the launchers. That was why he ordered a massed formation. She didn't let her delighted surprise stop her. "Striker Lead, Strikers, Firebats, Storm Knights! Go to cover positions. Rhinos, Albatrosses, give them a second helping!"

A quick visual check confirmed that despite it not being the order they expected, all her fighters had moved into the correct formation. The bombers were now clear for their own runs. Akane could picture what was happening now, even though she was keeping a careful watch for any Red Ribbon aircraft that might contest their passage.

Bombardiers in the chin turrets were lining up laser painters on their primary targets, guided by the plans and schematics HQ had passed on. Seconds later, a second wave of projectiles launched, this time from the bellies of the bombers, but rather than shooting forward on a pillar of flame, the laser guided bombs just swooped down steeply on stubby wings that scissored out from their sides, tail fins twitching as they homed in on a particular point of light.

There was a second wave of explosions as the formation broke off left and right over the base, and Akane heaved a sigh of relief. There were no enemy aircraft up, and as the hangars had been primary targets, there were unlikely to be any chasing them. It looked like she wouldn't be writing any letters to pilots' families this evening...

What happened next shouldn't have. The lack of radar contacts meant the strike had come as a complete surprise, and almost all of the Red Ribbon soldiers outdoors at the time either dived frantically for cover as the first wave of explosions hit, or didn't need to ever again.

The chances that one of the few who didn't do either had been out in the open, with a bazooka were ridiculous, and the chance that he'd

had a round in it for testing took that to ludicrous. Still, the universe is an unlikely place to start with, so the fact that he not only aimed and fired it at one of the overflying jets and actually hit it in the wing was one of those things that had to happen somewhere, some time.

Akane's world went into a spin as her cockpit instruments flashed and flared around her. A quick glance to the side confirmed that most of her right wing had been blown off, and as a result, her hundred million zenji jet fighter was now a pretty good paper-weight. Without the control surfaces or lift from her right wing, she had zero chance of stopping the roll.

"Mayday, Mayday, Striker Lead is hit, going down! All planes keep going!"

Fortunately the roll was slow enough that she could get some idea of what was going on. Her own trajectory had veered over the left side of the base, and the spin was carrying her back towards it as far as she could tell. That meant she'd make a crater somewhere near the far end of the runways.

Akane didn't intend to be in the plane when that happened, so she judged her time and pulled the ejection lever just as the roll brought her right way up. Everything worked, the canopy blew off and back, and a powerful compressed air ram launched her seat away from the fuselage.

Her parachute popped at the apex of her flight, and she started floating down. She saw her jet auger in between the runways, and breathed a sigh of relief. Of course, it didn't last long as she recalled that she was about to land in the middle of a hostile base, which she'd just helped attack. This was not a good situation.

Tails and the others watched the first wave of explosions when the missiles hit, and the second where the bombs followed. The planes were flying up the valley towards the main gate, and they mainly hit in and around the base, and took out the towers and gate at the main entrance.

The tower directly next to them was untouched, and so were most of the ones around the runway area. One hangar had collapsed in completely, but the second had just suffered a blown off roof, and the third was untouched. Tails was checking his computer even as the aircraft raced overhead.

"Whoa! They got all the anti-air systems, and a lot of the other turrets down... Yes! Tower 12 is down, and I'm getting a dragon-ball signal! The shielded box must have been in there, and the collapse busted it open!"

"Hey look!" Kurillin pointed, but they didn't really need the heads up. They saw the lone rocket shoot up and blast the wing off the plane, and saw the pilot punch out, their parachute opening high above the base. Tails glanced along the line of the wall, and went, "Uh oh!"

He started frantically punching out options on his computer, as he spoke. "I'm shutting down all those auto-turrets in line of site of the runway area. Goku, you lead in on the nearest tower, and get everyone across when you've taken out the guards. As soon as Goku and I have dealt with the manned turrets, go after the remaining hangars just like we planned."

He pointed up at the descending parachute. "If that guy lands in the middle of the runway with the manned turrets still active, it'll be as a colander. I've got to get him out of the sky fast, and while Goku's faster on Kinto-un, I'm more manoeuvrable."

He immediately twisted his tails up and blasted off into the air. He zoomed over the curtain wall, and shot towards the pilot like a missile. Akane had an impression of an orange blur off to one side, then the clasp of her five point harness crunched as someone reached around and broke it.

Before she could protest, or for that matter react, she was hauled out of the ejector chair and pulled towards the ground at terrifying speed by something, a pair of arms wrapped around her body. However, she was stopped short of street pizza-hood by those same arms,

and let down gently in the shadow of a cargo plane that for some reason was out in the middle of the runways.

She heard the chatter of machine guns in the background, but nothing came near her, and her first reaction was to turn and find out what had grabbed her. A two tailed fox in a well worn Capsule Corps jumpsuit with a pair of goggles was not what she'd expected, though she hadn't known what she \_had\_ expected.

"What the... why did you do that!" She exclaimed.

The ejector chair crashed to the runway a few hundred metres away, riddled with bullet holes and surrounded by shreds of parachute canopy.

"That's why." replied the fox, gesturing with one white gloved hand.

"Okay, good answer... Hey, you're that fox that was on the news!"

"I guess I am..." Tails had seen some of the news footage about his and Goku's past adventures, mostly Jingle Village and the Tenka'ichi Budo'kai. Some of the things they were saying about him made him horribly embarrassed. "You make it sound like it's just me. Gosh, Goku does all the heavy lifting, I mostly just figure stuff out and help."

He wasn't idle while he spoke. He was checking views from surviving security cameras around the runway area, as well as using his own mark one eyeballs. There were seven manned stone towers built into the wall at this end of the base, two at the midpoint of the long walls, two three quarters of the way along, and three at the far end, on the ends and in the middle of the northern short wall.

The three at the far end were out of range of the hangars, for any accuracy at least, but the other four could cover the area in front of the hangars, not to mention the cargo plane they were hiding behind. Short spiteful bursts of fire splattered around the edges of their cover, but he'd landed where the fuselage and wing blocked the western mid-point tower and the two further along.

The eastern mid-point tower had a clear view of them, but it wasn't going to be a problem. Goku and the gang had clearly already taken it, that was clear from the lack of fire and the fact that it had a distinctly crumpled look. The wall of the circular watch-room at the top had partially collapsed in on itself, and the witch-hat roof tilted at an angle somewhere between rakish and falling off completely.

Of course, there was also the problem of the Red Ribbon goons emerging from the two hangars that hadn't been completely wrecked by the bombardment. Some of them had spotted the pair by the cargo aircraft, and were already bringing up their guns. Tails reached up and pulled open a rear door.

"Get in! They don't seem to want us enough to shoot their own plane, and maybe you can find a radio to call your friends!" He pocketed his computer and tapped the side of his goggles. "Guys, I don't like how heavy those machine guns are. Wait one and Goku and I will remove them before you hit the hangars."

Akane stopped half-way into the plane. "What are you going to do?"

"Help out, like I said." Tails gave her a grin then jumped straight up, ascending like a rocket before any of the guns could track him. She looked up just in time to see him reach the apex of his flight, spinning his tails to keep flying up above the angle the guns could track him, and then arc down on a weaving, spiralling path towards the eastern mid-point tower.

Fortunately there was a matching door with a porthole window in the far side of the plane fuselage, so she could move across and see what happened. While he was back in the field of fire of at least one of the guns, his evasive manoeuvres were making a hash of the enemy's attempt to target him. At the last second, his flight straightened out, and he plunged straight down towards the roof of the tower. At the last second he seemed to transform into a glowing orange disk, as she'd seen from that martial arts tournament, and blasted straight through the pointed roof as if it was balsa-wood.

The gun covering the inside of the base fell out of it's window seconds later, the barrel useful only as a demonstrator for a pretzel maker. However, the fox was pinned down as far as she could see. The next gun along on the west side couldn't bear, but the one from across the east side could, and it was splattering the watch-room with fire.

Akane decided to call for help. She dashed up to the cockpit, and found radio-gear. Fortunately it was a military band radio, and fairly simple to adjust to the frequency her squadron was on.

"Striker Lead, any aircraft! I'm down inside the enemy base, but safe and under cover. Report!"

After a few seconds, Aoi replied. "Crimson? Is that really you? We thought..."

She trailed off and Akane didn't waste time. "Patch me through to Rhino Lead. Are you in range for another pass?"

They should be, she thought, the plan was for the bombers to support the paratroopers with fire-support.

"Okay... Done!" Aoi's voice came over the radio, joined by Squadron Leader Tatsu's. "You have something for us, Striker Lead?"

"Yes, bring a flight around the west side, as far out as you can while still getting a solid lock." She thought back to the plans she'd studied so intensively. "We missed Hangar 3 completely, and 2 was only damaged. And keep it on target, there are friendlies down here."

"But the paratroopers aren't supposed to be there yet!"

"Uh huh, call them special forces... Whoa!"

From the cockpit she had an excellent view of the entire north end of the base, and she couldn't quite believe what she was seeing. Tails was flying up the west side of the walls, weaving and dodging

around the unmanned pylon turrets even as he buzz-sawed through them, sending them crashing to the ground. A constant stream of tracer fire from the manned tower up ahead hunted him, but it couldn't intercept him.

Along the eastern wall someone else was flying towards a manned tower. This was a kid who appeared to be flying on a cloud, and... spinning something in front of him that seemed to deflect the stream of bullets aimed at him. She guessed this was the Goku kid who'd been in the news with him. He was simply smashing the towers with whatever that was he was waving as he went.

She considered calling in an air-strike on the three towers at the far end, but at the rate those two were going, by the time the bombs arrived they'd already be there. Tails was almost at the tower when he seemed to dive out of the sky, and she thought he'd been hit. He plunged out of sight in the base of a pylon, and the machine gun followed, but it was right underneath and the gunner clearly had trouble depressing it that far. The fact that he was still walking bursts of fire around it was actually comforting, he'd hardly be going after a target he'd hit.

A few seconds later Tails emerged into view, flying up over the outside of the wall and plunging into the undefended outer embrasure. The firing stopped, and the soldiers burst out of the door at the base a few seconds later, clearly panicking. It's brother on the east wall fared no better, Goku just ploughed straight in.

Her attention was distracted by a thudding on the fuselage of the aircraft. Part of the seat buckle was a shiny flat surface, so she held it up against the side window, angled to look back along the side of the plane. She could just see a group of Red Ribbon soldiers battering at the hatch she'd locked from the inside before coming up to the cockpit.

There were a dozen of them, with automatic rifles, and she had only her side-arm and two clips of ammo. Enough bullets for everyone if they'd stand there and let themselves be shot, but that wasn't going



to happen. This was a cargo plane, without any armour, and they could just shoot through the fuselage...

Four other figures appeared from the base of the central eastern tower, these dressed in various styles of martial arts clothing, and three of them went after the Red Ribbon goons who were trying to dolly out and prep a dozen jet patrollers. The other one peeled off and headed for her cargo plane, or rather the thugs attacking it, reaching them just as one of them shot out the door locked.

The little guy, bald with a pattern of six dots on his forehead and wearing a set of goggles like Tails', bounded into the middle of the group and started handing out beat downs on a first come, first served basis. It should have been a massacre, one unarmed man against twelve with rifles, and it was, but not the way she'd expected. He seemed to blur, vanish and reappear, and wherever he did, another Red Ribbon goon went down like a sack of spuds.

She decided to help, but by the time she'd smashed out the side window with the butt of her pistol and cleared away the glass, it was all over. He trotted over and looked up, eyes widening at her as she leaned out, still holding her side-arm.

"No need to wave that thing about, we're on the same side... sort of. Sorry, the name's Kurillin. It figures, Tails got to rescue a cute girl and he's the one too young to appreciate it. "

His grin took any malice out of the comment, and Akane found herself warming to the guy. The fact that he'd almost certainly saved her life didn't hurt either. "Akane, Wing Commander Akane Daimyo."

She couldn't help but look beyond him to the scene of carnage in front of the hangars. His three friends were at least as badly outnumbered as he'd been, but it made no difference. They danced around the Red Ribbon goons, dismantling them with ease. Not all of the soldiers had guns, some were mechanics with tools and wrenches, but even if they were armed, they were more likely to hit each other than the martial artists winnowing through them.

The biggest, another bald guy had a ripped gi that showed his chest, and she saw him take a burst of rifle fire on his bare skin as he dead-lifted over a ton of jet patroller over his head. It didn't seem to bother him, and he flung the air-craft at a group of three others, smashing them and rupturing fuel tanks which made them go up in a single massive explosion.

"Rhino Lead, Striker lead. Six parcels are inbound!" The radio chattered.

Akane remembered what Tails had done. "I suggest you get your friends away from the hangars. My guys are about to blow them!"

As Kurillin relayed the instructions, she glanced back to the north to see where the other two were. The corner towers hadn't put up any more effective resistance than the others, and both were looking wrecked. The one in the centre of the north wall was worse off, someone had ripped the roof from the western corner tower right off and flung it like a giant shuttle cock.

It had landed right on the centre tower, and while it had disintegrated in the process, it hadn't left much of the tower it had hit. The three guards staggering out of the door at the base showed they'd had the good sense to evacuate. But there was no sign of Goku or Tails.

Explosions made her turn and lean outside the window to see the remaining hangars go up. However, the fighters outside seemed clear of the blast. Just as they fell in on themselves, a group of vehicles, three jet patrollers and a combat air-car flew out and up into the sky. The combat air-car had twin 30 mm cannon where it's headlights should have been.

She snatched up the microphone. "Striker Lead, all. Four bandits up! Striker, Firebat, come in and clear them out!"

However, even as she spoke, two other flyers zoomed overhead towards them. Tails, boosting along in pusher propeller mode, and Goku on his cloud. They couldn't possibly be thinking...

The vehicles opened up and multiple streams of shells and bullets criss-crossed the sky in front of them. However, the two kids were dodging everything that was thrown at them. Goku held out the thing he'd been using earlier, a staff, and it extended out to a ridiculous length, smashing the wind-shield of the nearest patroller, and levering the pilot out still attached to his seat. The tip of the extended staff dropped down, dumping the seated pilot on the ground rather roughly.

Tails flew straight up between the twin streams of bullets spat at him by the air-car's twin guns, weaving above and below to evade the cross-streams of bullets from the other two jet patrollers. When he reached the bonnet of the air-car he simply did that buzz-saw trick and sawed the entire air-car in two down the centre line. The pieces crashed out of the sky and exploded on the runway. The pilot wasn't in it, having been pulled out of his car, and flung off by Tails to Goku for similar unceremonious dumping on the ground.

The two remaining hover vehicles had veered off when Tails had dived into the air-car, not wanting to shoot into their own side, and it cost them. As he finished cutting it in two, he came out of his spin and landed on one half of the falling vehicle, kicking off in a burst of speed that had him beside one of the patrollers before the pilot could even begin to turn.

He grabbed the fuselage, and punched a hole in the engine compartment, pulling out a fistful of wires. Removing wires from almost any aircraft more complex than a paper aeroplane generally had a negative effect on its flying ability, and this one was no exception. The whine of its under-jet turned into a stutter, and it sank out of the sky.

The charitable would have called its impact with the ground a landing, but even though the pilot was able to walk, or rather stagger away, it was quite clear from the mangled undercarriage and engine bell that the vehicle wouldn't leave the ground again without some heavy lifting gear.

Goku had been a lot less subtle, zooming in on Kinto'un and smashing the remaining aircraft in two just aft of the cockpit with Nyoi-bo. He then just caught the cockpit as it fell, and dropped it on a pile of boxes outside the wrecked hangars. The engine compartment fell right onto a fuelling cart and exploded enthusiastically.

Akane had watched this open mouthed, but she could hear her fighters in the distance. "Striker Lead, All Fighters! Scratch that, the sky's clear. Break and circle."

"Striker two, Striker Lead. I can still see two on my radar!"

"Those friendlies again! Overfly but do not engage! They took out the hostiles."

Goku and Tails were flying down to meet their friends, and Kurillin looked over towards them. "Gotta go! Sorry I couldn't talk some more but my friends need me!"

He dashed off just as her fighters swept overhead. They'd come in low to avoid any remaining anti-air craft fire, and seen the flying fox, and the kid on a cloud.

"Striker Lead, did I just see what I thought I saw?" Aoi's voice was so full of disbelief that Akane had to grin.

"Join the club. I was here for the whole show and I still don't believe it!"

Several other people couldn't believe it either. Bulma had gotten multiple security camera views of the runway area, even after most of them had been wrecked, and General Gun was fulminating.

"What do they think they're doing!"

Major Motoki replied. "Saving the life of one of our pilots and securing the runway area. Our paratroopers should be able to land unopposed."

"You knew about this?" the general turned on the colonel furiously. "You mean you actually gave civilians access to our battle plans?"

The colonel didn't flinch "I knew they were going to make their own attack to support ours, but I didn't provide any information beyond the publicly available, those press releases given out to show we were acting decisively, and spread disaffection among the enemy."

He didn't mention that the idea had been General Gun's, and to be honest, he hadn't protested, as he was fairly certain the Red Ribbon still had assets in the regular army command structure and probably knew the basic plan of attack, never mind the day, which had been specified in the releases.

The reminder stopped General Gun but he quickly found another avenue of attack. "Which doesn't explain how they got there, or knew to strike before we did! This interference has got to stop!"

"Son Goku and Miles Prower were the ones that developed the basic intelligence that lead us to the main base in the first place, not to mention a lot of the reconnaissance take, and they've certainly had enough experience sneaking around Red Ribbon patrols. As for attacking, bombarding the place was probably a pretty good sign our attack was warming up."

Bulma chipped in. "What do you think this doohickey was for in the first place? Tails intended to go after this main base long before he knew about your army attack. And when he found out what you were doing, he worked with the Colonel here to make sure the regular army got the same information he did. You should be thanking the Colonel, not threatening him!"

Rachael O'Shea closed in for the kill, hoping she could get direct footage from Bulma. General Gun, in what way have those six brave individuals harmed your operation?"

General Gun couldn't really answer, as so far, they hadn't, other than stealing his thunder by doing the job he'd expected to do. "They

haven't, not yet, but they could cause problems further down the line. Plus they could get hurt. This is a job for the army!"

"It's part of their creed as martial artists to fight evil and protect people, the Turtle school's anyway, and my boyfriend Yamcha chose that too." Bulma pointed out the wolf-fist school martial artist on the screen with pride in her voice. "They chose to put themselves at risk, just as every soldier in your army did. They have no intention of getting in your way, and every intention of helping."

General Gun was pinned down on all sides, unable to protest any further without looking like he was ungrateful, and simply mad over them showing him up. Which had a lot of truth. He turned to one of his aides. "Tell the paratrooper divisions to expedite! Since they've given us an opening ahead of schedule, we must make the most of it."

He just hoped that by the time they got there, there was still something for them to do.

He wasn't the only commanding officer who was practically frothing at the mouth. Commander Red was stomping around the underground bunker at the heart of the Red Ribbon base like a very short, red bearded elephant with irritable bowel syndrome.

"Arrggh! Imbeciles! Cowards! How could they let themselves be defeated by a bunch of civilians!"

The techies frantically trying to restore some sort of control to their control panels kept their heads down and carried on. When the radar had failed to spot the incoming aircraft, and their air defences had failed to engage, the commander had started to order them taken out and shot en-masse.

It was only the fact that the door had been sealed, and Adjutant Black's diffident reminder that these techies were the only ones they had available, that had saved their lives, for now. Not that they were having any luck, the test responses to all the command programs

were coming back okay, but when they tried to actually do anything, the commands were just ignored.

Commander Red glowered at the wall screen displaying the dragon-ball radar display, and the bright marks on top of the location of their base. He turned to Adjutant Black. "I need someone to guard the area where the dragon-balls are until we can retrieve them."

Without apparently consulting anything, Adjutant Black came back with, "Sergeant Indigo's squad is in the area. They'd just retrieved an AFV from the motor pool before it locked itself down."

Commander Red stomped over to the PA microphone and picked it up.

"Sergeant Indigo! Get your squad to courtyard 3 and secure it! All other units! Get to the hangar complex and destroy those invaders! Especially that blasted fox! I want his skin for a rug!"

While the damage around the hangar complex made the words relayed over the PA less than clear, Tails was already listening in via Bulma's tap on the comm system, and relaying them to everyone's goggles' comm system.

He made a face and looked around at the others, grouped in front of the hangar complex, and asked. "Why do they always want 'my skin as a rug'? I shampoo and take care of it, but still... think of the mess!"

"I think it's just an suitably evil sort of thing to say." Kurillin suggested. "Killing someone is one thing, mutilating them afterwards is taking it up a notch."

He carefully didn't look at Tien.

"Well, he's doing what I hoped." Tails shrugged. "Except for the guard over the dragon-balls, I need to get them. Otherwise we can go ahead as planned."

He held up a gloved hand when Goku started to speak up. "Sorry, but they'll be buried under tons of rubble, and only my Prower Drill Driver can dig through it fast enough. If you can sweep down the west side and make sure all the guns covering the main entrance are out of action and the gate is destroyed, that will be more help."

"While the rest of us fight everything they can throw at us here." Tien said sternly.

Tails' namesakes drooped. "I'm sorry to ask you to do it..."

Amazingly, Tien grinned without his face cracking under the unaccustomed expression. "Don't be, maybe if they do they'll give us a decent workout!"

Oddly enough, that weak bit of humour made Tails feel more comfortable around the three eyed martial artist than he'd been since he'd first met him. He grinned back, then turned and sped off.



# War Tails Part 3

## Chapter 27 - War Tails Part 3

Tails was skimming along the ground with his tails in pusher propeller mode. He was skimming down the inside of the eastern wall, and the space between the curtain wall and the walls of the buildings was fairly narrow. However, the buildings had taken enough damage that there was quite a bit of rubble lying around to use as cover from the manned guard tower ahead.

He went into a Tailspin attack each time he passed through a pylon, causing them to crash down. He tried to aim them to fall forwards or sideways to further damage the buildings and create cover. But even with his obvious approach, the tower didn't seem to react.

As he got close he started dodging and weaving unpredictably, in case they were holding fire until they could attack at close range giving him less time to dodge. Finally he was up against the tower, below the range they could depress their guns, and hugged the wall as he flew up to check it out.

He flew past to one side of the protruding muzzle of the machine gun and slammed the barrel with an open palm strike that knocked it sideways and bent it out of true. He grabbed it and used it to arrest his upward motion, flipping into the guard room through the gun port. He spun to land in a ready stance and instantly ready to move out of the way of any attack.

However, it wasn't needed, and he quickly realised why. One of the laser guided bombs had hit the tower, come right in through the gun port on the other side, damaging the sides but somehow failed to go off. Maybe it hadn't stopped abruptly enough to trigger the impact fuse.

Obviously the guards had immediately vacated, and he should too, as the thing was armed and any vibration might trigger it... like the pieces crumbling from the damaged wall that had been shaken loose by his landing! The fastest way out was over the bomb, and he took it, blasting out of the turret a few seconds before the bomb did it for him.

He ignored the explosion behind him, his tail propellers blunting the overpressure wave and allowed him to ride it. A glance showed that the next manned tower along, the one at the south-east corner, wouldn't be giving any further trouble either. It had also taken a bomb, and this one had worked as designed.

He pushed away the thought of what was in the ruins of the guard tower, and focussed on the ruin ahead instead. His course had taken him down towards the courtyard where Tower 12, Commander Red's private sanctum had fallen. It had been hit low down and collapsed like a tree trunk, measuring its length across the courtyard. While the top part had disintegrated completely into rubble, the lower part still partially held its curved shape, looking like a half cylinder.

However, the dragon-ball detector on his goggles' HUD indicated his business was with the top most part. His rapid flight and the pressure wave had given him a good initial velocity, and he somersaulted round, feet first, to start spinning like a drill his tails wrapped around him and started to glow with his amber ki energy.

He barely slowed as he plunged into the rubble, tunnel collapsing behind him, and Prower Drill drove his way along the path his HUD had showed him. He felt, one, two spheres, different from the gravel and junk surrounding them, and plucked them away as he passed them.

He burst feet first from the far side of the wrecked tower, ending up further down, and in front of the half wrecked section. He landed gracefully, a dragon-ball still clutched in each hand, and right under the assault rifles of a dozen Red Ribbon goons and the muzzle of a

30 mm auto-cannon belonging to the Armoured Fighting Vehicle they were grouped around.

Sergeant Indigo's squad, Tails realised. They must have reached here just as he was emerging. Normally this wouldn't have been a problem, as he could have dodged faster than they could see, but his tails were still wrapped around his legs, and the fraction of a second it required Tails to untangle himself gave the soldiers enough time to open fire.

However, just because he couldn't move didn't mean he was defenceless. His ki was still focussed into hardening his body for the drive through the rubble, and was easily refocussed to provide the bullet-proofing technique he'd practised with Goku. However, assault rifle bullets were at the upper end of what Tails could take, so he couldn't just stand there or block bullets directly with his hands.

He weaved and dodged on the spot as his tails unwound, both hands blurring as he interposed the impenetrable surfaces of the dragon-balls between his body and bullets. There was so much fire that he wasn't 100 percent effective, especially as part of his attention was diverted into making sure none of the ricochets hit the soldiers firing at him.

He concentrated on blocking or diverting the bullets closest to his centre of mass, protecting his head and body as he unwound his tails from around his legs. Others could be evaded completely, but he was forced to accept some hits, on his arms, legs and edges of his body. Striking at an angle, they only grazed him, and his body hardening made sure he only received bruises, and a couple of minor scratches.

Then the 30 mm cannon opened up with it's explosive rounds. The soldiers saw a flash and clouds of smoke as they hit, and a body rag-dolling backwards through a cave-like hole in the ruined tower behind their target. The cannon stopped, and the soldiers looked around in disbelief. The two tailed fox was no-where to be seen. The

gunner behind the 30 mm cannon punched the air and yelled, "Yes! We got him!"

The grizzled grizzly bear wearing sergeant's stripes who sat in the cupola behind him rumbled. "We can't be sure of that. Shinkuhatsu, Shiniku, move forward and check inside for the body."

The two soldiers moved gingerly forward, guns poking ahead of them and they approached the dark hole in the disintegrating masonry. Shinku peered into the darkness. "It's hard to see in here, but I think I see something lying..."

An orange blur burst out of the wall to one side of them, causing the already damaged wall to collapse in on itself and sending both soldiers staggering backwards as the cloud of dust and debris from the collapse billowed out around them. The orange streak veered around and past them, sweeping up one side of the main group and down the other side. Each red Ribbon army goon found their assault rifles being ripped from their hands as it passed.

The blur finally resolved itself as it came to a stop on the glacis plate of the AFV, alongside the 30 mm cannon, and within arms reach of the gunner. The figure standing there was Tails with a bundle of assault rifles under one arm. He dropped them and stamped several times, bending the barrels and rendering them useless. Before the AFV gunner could react, he also put a foot on the barrel of the 30 mm cannon and reached down to grab the muzzle, then yanked. The barrel bent upwards at the edge of his foot, rendered as useless as the rifles.

A student of detail would have noticed that he used the same hand as he'd used for the rifles, because he held the other one clasped close to his chest. The almost indestructible fabrics of the glove had shredded around the fingers, and his the short claws on the ends of his fingers showed through. Tails flexed it gingerly and winced, he had movement, but it clearly hurt. "Yeow! That stings!"

He'd managed to put a dragon-ball between himself and the stream of cannon fire, which had no more luck penetrating the ball than assault rifle bullets, but these shells had exploded as they hit, acting like a pulse jet rocket engine. Tails' body hardening, and the way the explosion was shaped as it blasted off the ball meant that his fingers were just bruised, though they tore his glove to shreds. The recoil hadn't done his wrist and arm any good either, though his body hardening meant he still had a wrist, and a hand attached to it.

The suddenness of the attack hadn't given him time to set himself, so he had been bowled off his feet and flung backwards by the sequence of explosions. His tails were unwound by this point and he managed to adjust his trajectory in mid-flight to keep the dragon-ball soaking up the punishment. Once inside the collapsed tower, he'd managed to side-step the attack completely, getting out of the line of fire and gaining a moment to recover.

While the unexploded bomb in the tower hadn't given him time to do anything other than react, and neither had the attack by Sergeant Indigo's platoon, once he'd been out of the line of fire, he'd been shaken, to say the least. He knew just how close those shells had come to turning him into mincemeat. His body hardening might be able to absorb or reduce small arms fire, but those things were designed to punch out armoured vehicles.

He'd had to clamp down on it hard, and managed by reminding himself that showing any fear, any lack of confidence as he fought them would make what he had planned less effective, and potentially increase the casualties on both sides. As always Tails could ignore, if not forget his own fear as long as he was protecting someone else. Maybe it wasn't how Sonic or Goku did it; he didn't think either of them knew what fear even was, but he wasn't Sonic or Goku. So he'd put away the dragon-balls and headed out.

However, the goons hadn't seen any of his actions or his momentary attack of the heebie-jeebies. So as far as they were concerned, they'd just seen him block and deflect an entire platoon's worth of rifle fire and shells from a 30 mm auto-cannon, with his bare (or

rather gloved) hands, and then come storming out to destroy every weapon they had in less time than they'd take to start firing. The gunner Tails was looming over fainted dead away, and several of the other Red Ribbon goons were suddenly glad that the default colour of their uniform trousers were brown.

Tails glanced around, seeing if any of them were going to attack, then pulled out his pocket computer and transferred it to hold in his injured hand. The other hand punched in a code. He searched for a camera covering the approach road to the south, and miraculously found one that hadn't been destroyed. It showed the road from the gates was clear, but he decided to double check, and set his comm to contact his friend.

"Goku? Are you in position?"

"I was here ages ago! But there's no-one here to fight!" Tails could hear the disappointment in the sai-jin's voice. "Can I go back to the others?"

"Not yet. The road's clear, and the gate and weapons covering it are destroyed?"

"Yep! They were pretty much done when I got here."

"Awesome!" Tails grinned. "Okay, you can go help the..."

Sergeant Indigo, being the one who'd have gotten the kudos if they'd killed the fox, and was likely to get it in the neck for not killing him, was the only Red Ribbon army soldier who had any fight left in him. He'd frozen up like everyone else when the fox reappeared, but when he started ignoring everyone to play with his toy computer, Indigo decided to have a go.

He pulled a combat knife from a leg sheath, and hurdled the edge of the cupola, jumping up onto the glacis plate of the AFV to stab it home in the fox's back. But Tails was still fully aware of his surroundings, even though his primary attention was on other things.

He sensed rather than saw Indigo's lunge, and as soon as the big bear had committed to the strike, he acted.

He swayed out of the path of the strike, turning and setting his feet apart, and setting himself. His uninjured hand reached out to wrap around the wrist of Indigo's knife hand, and pulled, adding his own strength to the furious attack. Indigo soared over the glacis plate of the AFV, and landed on the flat of his back, upside down on the half collapsed tower wall, which proceeded to fully collapse in response.

"Anyone else?" Tails glanced around. It was the kind of thing Sonic would do, and right now that was the sort of attitude he needed to project. Oddly enough there were no takers. All he needed to complete the impression was a quip of some sort. "Sorry, someone needed a hand. Yes, you can get back to the others. Have fun."

He went back to his computer and punched out a new combination. The PA speakers in courtyard and elsewhere crackled and went silent, chopping off another order from Commander Red. Then Tails spoke through them..

"Soldiers of the Red Ribbon army! This is Miles Prower speaking, known to my friends as Tails, which you're not. However, that doesn't mean I, or any of my friends, want to hurt anyone I don't have to. Your defences are destroyed, your air-cover is gone, and you've been invaded by me and Goku. So far we've flattened everything you've sent out, and this time we've brought along those friends I mentioned, who are even tougher.

"The probability of your defeating us approaches zero, and if you did, the regular army is incoming to stomp this whole place flatter than a parking lot. If I were you, I'd be thinking of talking some unscheduled leave. Of course I know you can't, the only way out of the Red Ribbon is in a box. Or was... your not-very-high command has locked himself in a bunker, and I control the comms system. The defences are down, and so is the main gate. As for the mine-field covering the road..."

He gave a last check on the virtual display in his goggles that the road was clear and punched another code. There was a string of tightly spaced explosions as he detonated every mine buried there.

"... is no longer an issue. So my advice is to juice it on out of here, and throw away your weapon. Soldiers from the real army will be coming in from all sides, and if you run towards them with a weapon, they may misinterpret what you're doing and shoot you. If we have to my friends and I will hunt down each and every one of you, but you can avoid that by leaving and surrendering."

The PA went off, but Commander Red's voice didn't continue. Tails looked around at the remaining conscious soldiers. "That means you too. Unless you still want to try and collect my pelt?"

He jumped down lightly and took a stance. Shinku took one look over at the bear lying unconscious on a pile of rubble and exclaimed, "Blast this for a game of soldiers! He's right, let's get out of here!"

That set off an avalanche as the whole squad beat feet out of the courtyard in the direction of the main gate. Tails started checking other cameras in the complex, and grinned as he saw they weren't the only ones. Dozens of soldiers were leaving their posts and heading towards the main gate. An officer started waving a pistol at his squad to get them back into line, and was side-swiped in the head by a rifle butt.

He realised he was hearing a distant humming, and as he looked up, several flights of quad engined tilt-rotors flew overhead towards the landing field, escorted by some of Akane's fighters. He just saw the first of them start to drop parachutes before they disappeared behind the remaining buildings. He set his comms to reach everyone.

"Guys, the regular army is sending in paratroopers. Everyone okay?"

There was a chorus of affirmative replies. Kurillin exclaimed. "Most of these guys I could handle before I started training with Master Roshi!"



"Leave some for the troops!" Tails sighed with relief. It looked like things were working out. "I'm coming back to join you. I picked up the balls, now it's almost over."

In General Gun's command post, there had been a certain amount of tension. Bulma had been following Tails via security camera, just as she had the others, and when he appeared to have been killed she had screamed out, "Tails!"

General Gun wisely said nothing about this being why civilians shouldn't mess in army affairs, as he surmised, correctly that the blue haired girl would probably punch him in the face. Besides, he couldn't help but root a bit for the fox despite himself. Everyone in the command post heaved a sigh of relief when Tails reappeared and proceeded to kick Red Ribbon butt. Bulma even managed to get audio from tapping into one of the soldiers radios, and they heard his comments.

Rachael O'Shea turned to her cameraman. "Please tell me you were recording that!"

"Tones and bars chief!" He gave a thumbs up.

They saw and heard Tails' speech, and saw the initial reaction for a couple of seconds, then everything went dead.

"What happened?" General Gun demanded.

"They finally figured out we were using their own comms network to invade their computers, and shut it down." Bulma shrugged. "Took them long enough, Tails practically hit them over the head with it."

"But that means we have no more oversight of what's going on, and you've lost control!"

Bulma smirked and punched out a macro on the primary command line display. Everything came back up. "One of the first things Tails would have done is plant a back-up transceiver somewhere,

probably in a junction box at the base of one of those gun turret pylons, they were hooked into the computer system.

"All those Red Ribbon types have done is shut down their own communications. Which means trying to stop that..." She pointed to the screens and the deserting Red Ribbon soldiers. "... is going to be impossible."

Colonel Motoki added his own comments. "As you know sir, the Red Ribbon is a very top-down organisation, with very little leeway for lower ranking officers to show initiative and big penalties for getting it wrong. With Commander Red out of the loop, the remaining forces won't be able to organise or co-ordinate effectively."

"Of course." General Gun nodded. "Basic tactics. Though you can never count on leading an enemy into doing what you want them too."

Bulma shook her head. "We weren't counting on it, it just makes our job, your job easier."

"Hmmp! And that little speech? Was that part of this plan?"

"Based on your own demoralisation tactics sir." Colonel Motoki replied. "Tails, Prower knew that his and Son Goku's appearance inside their base would be a body blow to whatever morale they had left, so the best thing to do would be to make sure they understood just how dire things were, and then offer them a way out."

"It relied on your 'Ring of Steel' to mop them up, and there will be some who's crimes mean they have nothing to lose by fighting, but the it was almost certain that a significant number would abandon the base, especially given the mercenary character of the average Red Ribbon recruit. Not only does it reduce the total number of effectives we'll have to fight, it wrecks their unit organisation further."

The images on the screens gave visible proof to that. Dozens of soldiers were just running for the main entrance, tossing down their

weapons, and the few who were actively engaged with either the other martial artists or the paratroopers who were coming up were wavering.

The reporter chipped in. "I just wish we could get better images. Is this being recorded?"

"Yep!" Bulma pointed at her console. "Everything's in here. But the Colonel agreed with Tails that it all goes to the army once we're done, so you'll have to ask them."

"General?" Rachael O'Shea turned to him.

General Gun might be hard-headed, but he was also a realist. You had to be with yourself, at least, if you wanted to play the political game. So far he wasn't coming out of this covered in glory, even though it looked like the operation would be a stunning success. If he kept on the way he had been, he was likely to look even more of a fool.

He'd been out-manoeuvred at every turn by the Colonel and his civilian friends. A part of him was actually glad, because in the process they'd managed to shore up what were now clearly massive holes in his operations plan. What was more, the way Motoki had acted, he was not only offering him a chance to jump on their bandwagon, but saving a seat and placing a cushion it. It seemed his best bet was to play along.

This thing about the recordings was a perfect example. By giving over all the data without a fuss, this Prower was demonstrating that he was co-operating with the army. But trying to hold onto it or suppress the footage was likely to be impossible with the reporter there. Much as he hated it, he had to admire how perfectly he'd been played.

"I'm sure we can organise something once the recordings have been reviewed." He replied magnanimously. It wouldn't hurt to gain some points with the O'Shea. Besides, if they had plenty of action footage

to play, they wouldn't need to pad their reports with any footage of his less than stellar reactions earlier on.

"Get me Major Daisho." The general strode over to his comms operator. "He needs to be fully informed of what's going on."

While General Gun was jumping on the bandwagon, Commander Red was simply jumping up and down in a temper tantrum. Tails and Bulma had left him access to the security cameras, since he could no longer do a thing about what he saw on them except fume.

He watched as the remaining soldiers started to run or just surrender, while paratroopers spread out from the air-field. The first few loads had parachuted in, but when they confirmed that the field was actually secured, the rest of the tilt-rotors simply landed to unload.

"Cowards! How pathetic! They're a disgrace to the colour red! How could a couple of brats do so much damage!"

Adjutant Black commented. "We clearly underestimated them a lot. I'm afraid retreat is our only option."

"No! Not without the balls! The radar shows they're out there, that fox may even have them on him!"

"In which case sir, they are certainly out of reach..."

Commander Red slammed his hands into a console and growled. "Damn it! I was so close! Just a little bit longer and I would have been tall!"

"Did you say, 'tall' sir?" Adjutant Black asked with surprise. "You don't mean that we were gathering the dragon-balls just to make you bigger?"

"Yes!" yelled Commander Red. "You have a problem with that?"

"But I thought we were after world domination!"

"We'll get to that, we'll get to that." Commander Red pulled himself up. "But a conqueror has to be charismatic... dominating... impressive. I mean, what chick will look twice at a midget?"

Adjutant Black was still incredulous. "It was for something as petty as that, that we suffered?"

Commander Red stomped right up to him, which put his face at the height of Black's sternum. "You see? Tall people have no idea how we feel! Ever since I was a kid, I've been taunted and ridiculed. 'Hey, it's that shrimp Red!'. I've even been told 'You have such a mature face for a little boy...'"

"I have slaved and risked my life for one reason only. To advance the Red Ribbon Army's mission of world conquest!"

"Shut up! I am the Commander in Chief, and I get to say what we do!"

Adjutant Black was coming out of his state of shock and getting angry. "Do you realise how many soldiers have sacrificed their lives, how much money we've spent, so you wouldn't be short!"

Commander Red was already there. "How dare you speak to your Commander like that!? Anyway, they would have won if they'd been trained better! People should learn to keep their mouths shut and obey their commander's orders!"

There was the sound of a pistol shot, and Commander Red toppled over backwards, a bullet hole in his forehead. Adjutant Black waved his pistol at the techies and soldiers in the room, none of whom tried to intervene.

"He was not competent to be the Commander. The Red Ribbon army will rise again under new command... my command. Commander Black shall fulfil it's destiny of world conquest. But not here, not now."

He pulled out a capsule and popped it, revealing a suit of battle armour over three metres tall. The top was a domed cockpit, and it's arms bulged with weapons pods. A large backpack was mounted on it, with an engine exhaust poking out from underneath.

He bounded up into the open cockpit, and the bubble canopy closed down around him. One of the techies inquired nervously, "But... sir, won't you need the secure records? And what about us?"

"Do you really think I don't have duplicates? I dealt with all those administrative details. As for you, you will all have to fend for yourselves. Farewell!"

He moved over to a particular spot on the floor, and in response to some signal a hatch opened above him, leading to the surface. A downward facing rocket engine built into the main body ignited and lifted him up through the hole.

Tails was making his way back to the others, who had drawn back to the air-field now the paratroopers were taking over. None of the remaining Red Ribbon goons were putting up a fight anyway. The only place that could still be considered under Red Ribbon control was the bunker.

He was monitoring the cameras there on an inset window on his goggles, and caught the argument and Commander Red's demise just as he reached them. He stopped in shock, then turned to look in the direction of the main complex.

Kurillin noticed, and asked. "What's up?"

"He just shot him... Adjutant Black, Commander Red's second in command just shot him and now he's getting into some sort of suit of power armour. Is he going to fight... No, it's got a rocket engine, he's going to fly out!"

That caught the attention of the CO of the paratroopers, Major Daisho, who'd set up a command post under the wing of the cargo

plane. Akane had brought him up to speed on the six martial artists, though he wasn't sure he believed some of the more outrageous claims.

He was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt, especially as his lead elements had encountered them still fighting the Red Ribbon goons, and the fact that he'd been ordered by General Gun himself to treat them all with kid gloves. Now he turned to the fox who seemed to be examining something invisible... no there was some sort of image projected on the inside of the goggles he was wearing.

"What was that?" He asked.

Tails repeated his explanation as a flare of a rocket lifted from between two of the buildings deeper in the base. The Major turned to Akane. "Please tell me you have something to catch him."

Akane shook her head. "Sorry, our load-out was for Alpha Strike, not Combat Air Patrol. Maximum missile load, no drop tanks. As soon as we were sure the air was clear, I sent them back to base to refuel. I have a flight of bombers on station for artillery support, but they're not going to catch that thing. The earliest I can get a jet back on station is another twenty minutes."

The Major started to say some very bad words then cut himself off. He'd concurred with the order once he was sure the airfield was secure. The only other thing they had were his tilt-rotors, and they weren't likely to catch the thing either. Still he had to try. "Get your bombers after him, and I'll get some of my ships up..."

Tails signalled to Goku. "C'mon, we're the only ones who can catch him... Sorry, guys..." He added for the others' benefit, "... but we're the two fastest fliers here!"

He wound up his tails and lifted up into the air. Goku yelled out "Kinto'un!" and bounded up onto the flying cloud that responded. Then they both shot off after the fleeing Red Ribbon mecha, Tails going to Deuce Juice mode as soon as possible.

Daisho looked after them for a second with a stunned expression, but shook his head and recovered. "My order stands Wing Commander. Even if those two catch up, they may need support."

While the regular army was getting ready, Goku and Tails were overhauling the fleeing battle armour. It suddenly turned to face them, angling backwards so it's jet pack was still driving it up and away, and an amplified voice was heard.

"So, you won't give up? Well even you aren't invincible against my battle jacket! Prepare to be the first casualties of the reborn Red Ribbon army!"

The figure raised an arm in their direction, and tails called out. "Goku! Break left!"

As the two of them split apart, a beam of crimson energy shot from a pod on the battle-jacket's fore-arm. It passed through the space where their bodies had been a second ago and expended it's energy on a tower of the base far below, which had a huge hole melted in it.

"Waagh!" Goku yelped, and Tails called out, rather redundantly. "A laser! Don't let it hit you!"

Adjutant Black fired several more blasts, but though they evaded every one, the evasive manoeuvres they were forced to do caused them to lose ground. Adjutant Black grinned to himself. He wouldn't go down so easily. But there was one more thing he had to do before he destroyed these two and made his getaway.

He triggered a targeting scope and a cross-hair aligned, not on the two fliers, but the base itself. A lot of his advantages would be neutralised if the army got their hands on the secure data files, and at the moment that looked certain. Since he hadn't been able to destroy the files, he'd have to destroy the base, and fortunately, he had the means.



He shut down power to his jet as he flipped end for end, facing the base. A hatch opened on the top of his backpack, and a missile shot forth, blasting down towards the base. He continued the spin and brought up his rocket engine started flying away at maximum velocity. The warhead inside the missile would be quite sufficient to destroy the base, and the EMP would erase everything in the system, even if the blast didn't destroy the bunker completely. It might even catch those two annoying kids as they were unarmoured and closer to the explosion.

It was a pity to lose the base, but it would take a lot of army soldiers with it, and destroy the records. It would also kill any remaining Red Ribbon personnel, but sacrifices had to be made to further the goal of world conquest.

Tails saw the rocket fly past, a rocket as tall as he was with two sets of fins projecting from it. He quickly realised it hadn't been aimed at them. "Goku! Go get Black, I'll get that bomb!"

He shot back after it, trying to figure out what it could be. Whatever it was, he wouldn't have thrown it at the base unless it was capable of doing some serious damage. He cranked his thrust even higher and overhauled it, slipping in to grab onto it and wrap his legs around its body. The rear fins moved to bring it back on course as he hit, while the top ones looked to be fixed.

He looked for an access hatch, and found one between the forward fins, with a the trefoil symbol they used for radiation. A tactical nuclear weapon would destroy the base and everyone still there, and a ground-based explosion was likely to make it an exceptionally dirty explosion, with lots of radioactive dust in the air. Fortunately it wasn't proximity fused, or if it was it only covered the forward arc, otherwise he wouldn't be here.

His excellent imagination filled in the details of exactly what would happen to him if it went off, and he shivered, scared of what he'd imagined, what a single mistake could cost. Then he looked down at the base ahead of him, and forced his nerves down. He only had

seconds to act, and all those people were counting on him to get it right, even if they didn't know it. He couldn't let them down.

First, get it away from the base. He shifted around the underside and slammed his boots down on the leading edges of the rear fins, even as he cranked up his tails to maximum thrust. The taller remaining towers of the Red Ribbon HQ seemed to be reaching up to claw him out of the sky, but the off centre thrust and angling the fins leading edges down, caused the missile to veer away from it's downwards swoop and into an ascent just in time to evade them.

Once the missile was flying away from the base, he could get to work on disarming it. As he got further away the chances of anyone apart from him being hurt lessened, and his nerves eased. He winced as he used the claws of his still injured hand to rip off the access panel. He'd briefly considered it might be booby trapped, and discarded it. The only time you'd want to access the weapon would be on the ground, when it would be your own people getting in. Who would consider needing to protect it in mid-air?

What he saw inside confirmed his hypothesis. Bad thriller stories aside, you made weapons, especially missiles, as hard to set off as possible, and as easy to disarm. The one thing you did not want to happen was for a weapon, especially a nuclear weapon to go off unless you really, really meant it. So there were no complex sets of multi-coloured false wiring, timers and mysterious thingamajigs that had to be lifted out without touching the sides, or any of the other pieces of gadgetry that could have complicated things.

At the rear of the compartment was a basic inertial guidance platform, while the rest was a warhead. There was a central sphere of metal with a heavy flange running around it, the container for the fissile material. From the size it would have a yield somewhere in the 1 to 5 kiloton range. He suppressed the terrifying image that the calculation created, and focussed on the device as an abstract piece of engineering.

At the front of the sphere was a gun barrel-like arrangement with a pair of wires leading off from the outer end. Attached to it, near where it joined the sphere was a heavy looking guillotine arrangement with it's own set of wires. They led to a control box mounted on the side of the compartment with a few switches and a row of illuminated red LEDs, and wires leading up to the nose, and into one of the fins.

Clearly the 'gun barrel' contained a plug of fissile material. There was a matching gap in the material in the sphere, which kept it below critical mass. When the detonator in the barrel fired, it would shoot the slug into the main mass, causing it to exceed critical mass, start a chain reaction, and make things terminally unpleasant for anybody nearby.

The guillotine was a safety interlock, when lowered it would prevent the slug reaching the main mass, and act as additional protection against any stray neutrons that could cause an unintended reaction. From the design, it was raised by an active solenoid. A switch on the fin, probably activated by a cord hooked to the launch tube had armed it, had activated the solenoid and connecting the detonator to the firing circuit.

It took only seconds for Tails to deduce the design, and just as well, as he might not have too much time. There were three things you could do with a missile that had failed to hit it's target. Firstly, set it to disarm after a certain time, second, let it run until it hit something, or three, blow it up either by a timer or remotely.

Hopefully Goku would be keeping Adjutant Black too busy to trigger a remote, but a timer circuit could be concealed inside the control box. Once again, as it would only act after the missile had launched, there was no neat digital readout to show just how soon it would boom. Still, he wouldn't need long. He pulled out his old pocket tool-kit and selected a pair of wire cutters.

First, trigger the safety interlock. He reached in with his good hand and carefully snipped the safety interlock wires one by one. His heart

gave a little skip as it 'snicked' down into place, and an LED on the control box turned green. Now he could do the same to the detonator wires. They cut just as easily, and a red LED labelled 'Armed' went out. He double checked the compartment to see if there were any other wires leading to it and confirmed there weren't.

He heaved a sigh of relief, just as the rocket engine died, another LED went out and a spark jumped across the raw ends of the detonator wires. So there had been a built in 'end-of run' timer, and he'd beaten it by a dozen seconds, at best. Suddenly he heard an explosion, and his heart thumped, but the very fact that he was still there to be shocked indicated it wasn't him.

Hauling the dead weight of the missile around, he saw a cloud of debris in the far distance. He immediately yelled out, "Goku!"

"Hey, Tails! The bad guy kind of blew up. Awful sorry about that." The young sai-jin's voice was apologetic.

"What happened?" He was miles away from the base by now, over the foothills of a mountain and he decided that was the best place to stay until he could hand this thing over to someone who could dismantle it. He started lowering the missile down towards a clear alp as Goku replied.

"Well, I hit that lazy thing with my staff, and it went all to bits, so I flew in and started fighting that battle jacket. It could actually punch pretty hard, but Kinto'un caught me. I jumped up on it's shoulder and it tried to punch me again, but punched the big glass bowl, and nearly knocked the bad guy out.

"I tried to pull him out, but he flew off really fast, I fell off, and flew after him using my tail like you do. I figured it was that fire shooting thing on his back that was making him fly, so I poked it with my staff. I guess I must have poked it a bit too hard. ."

Tails landed, and released the missile with a sigh of relief. "It's okay. You did what you could to catch him. That engine was powerful, and

must have been running really hot, and when you hit it, the whole thing overloaded."

"Are you okay?" Goku asked.

Tails looked over at the base, where ant-like soldiers could be seen moving around, and more vehicles were coming in, and smiled. Using the digital binocular feature on his goggles, he zoomed in to see the group of techies from the main bunker being escorted across the dispersal area, hands on heads, by paratroopers. The rest of his own team was out on the air-field, none of them the worse for wear. One of the tilt-rotors had taken off and started to head towards him.

"I'm fine." He realised he was too. Unhappy that people had died despite his best efforts, tired after his exertions and the strain of disarming the bomb, but also glad that his friends, the army guys, and even most of the Red Ribbon guys had survived, and that he'd helped make that possible. He sat down by the missile, popped the picnic hamper capsule and had a chilli-dog and a soda while he waited for the tilt-rotor. Sonic was right, chilli-dogs did taste like victory.

**Authors Notes:** Whew! Well there it is, the climactic battle. And yes, in canon Dragon Ball, Adjutant Black did kill Commander Red, and launch a nuclear missile at the base, which Goku simply kicked away, letting it take out a nearby mountain. I could have written more about the other fighters, but this is primarily Tails' story.

I had one more chapter written up, dealing with the aftermath, including the all important summoning of the dragon, but on re-reading, it seems more like an outline than a proper story. So it's going to be re-written as two chapters which will take us to the long awaited end of this half of the story.

# A Twist in the Tails

## Chapter 28 - A Twist in the Tails

Tails was finally back at the Kame House, and ready for the journey home. It had been two weeks since the defeat of the Red Ribbon army, and it had been all too short for the number of things he'd had to do. He'd always thought that once he had all seven dragon-balls he'd just wish himself home and that was it. But that wasn't how it had worked out.

First there had been the award ceremony. King Koku, elected king of all the Provinces of Chikyuu and by the Grace of Kami, Ruler of the World, had insisted on rewarding the six of them for their courage. If Tails had realised the footage from the Red Ribbon cameras would end up on TV, he'd never have included a record function. The only good thing was that at least all the others had been recorded doing their own things, so it wasn't just him in the limelight.

The event had been held in Central City, at the King's Castle. He could still remember the parade beforehand, with the streets lined with cheering people. It had been the World Martial Arts tournament, turned up until the knob snapped off. Goku had taken it with his usual easy-going good nature, and Yamcha and Kurillin had been thoroughly enjoying it, as had Chiaotsu. Tien seemed less enthusiastic, but he was clearly putting up with it for the sake of his little friend.

However Tails had oscillated between enjoying it and being even more embarrassed than when he'd seen the earlier news reports, or rather the commentaries. They'd also re-played the videos of the World Martial Arts Tournament, and everything they could find out about him and his friends was being splattered all over the air-waves. Some of the things said about him weren't even true, much less accurate.

The best chance he had to set the record straight and to give out Colonel Motoki's cover story was when Rachael O'Shea of ZTV had managed to catch him after the ceremony and had interviewed him. At least her reports up till then had been accurate, she'd clearly gone and interviewed people at Jingle Village, then found out about Lee Kei's part in things, and done an interview at his salvage yard. Thankfully Colonel Motoki had gotten there first with Tails' personal plea not to spill anything beyond his origin story, and she'd not found out anything they didn't want her to.

There'd been a massive combined late birthday and going-away party the previous night and the house still looked messy. As the first one up, Tails got the rice cooking for breakfast, and did some cleaning up while the TV played. Scenes from the ceremony and his interview were playing, which wasn't as much of a coincidence as it first seemed, as they had been quite frequently since the ceremony.

The on-screen reporter was just saying, "So Tails, I believe you prefer that to Miles, you seem to be the hero of the hour. What do you think of all this?"

"Actually, I don't feel like people should be calling me a hero. My friends, yes, they deserve all the credit anyone can give them, but for me, it started out as a quest to find my way home, and everything else just happened. People are acting as if just because I brought my friends together for the final attack, I'm somehow responsible for it. I just did my part.

"There are so many other people who deserve the credit. Colonel Motoki and his people who did such a great job of actually capturing and bringing the Red Ribbon soldiers to justice after Goku and I found them, Bulma for helping with the technical side of things, Lee Kei for helping to build the Sea Fox, General Gun's army for their part in assaulting the main base, and of course, my friends. Goku, who was with me every step of the way, and did far more of the fighting than I did.

Tails remembered how he'd decided this was his best chance to get everyone else their rightful recognition, as his on screen self continued.

"Kurillin, my sensei, who taught me how to fight and ready to jump in and help when I asked. Yamcha, who's an awesome martial artist in his own right, and Tien Shinhan and Chiaotsu, who are scary powerful too. Not only were they willing to help, for no other reason than that it was the right thing to do, but they were willing to follow my plans, do things my way.

"My part in it was just to put together the information, and plan out how to use what forces we had most effectively, while finding ways to diminish the forces the Red Ribbon could throw at us and the army. Even in that I had the help of Colonel Motoki. So while I did my part, and I'm proud of what I did, I think people should be focussing more on everyone else."

The canine reporter asked, "You forgot to mention rescuing Wing Commander Daimyo, or fighting General Blue, one of the Red Ribbon Army's most dangerous people, or defusing the nuclear bomb that would have killed everyone at the base in mid air. Some people would say those were suitably heroic."

"I was in the right place at the right time. I'm an engineer, and I can fly, so who better to defuse a falling bomb? I'd have been blown up too, unless I'd flown away, which I wouldn't, not with so many people counting on me. It's a martial artist's code to protect the innocent and fight evil where it arises.

"If heroism is anything, it's going beyond what's expected of you. What I did was no less than was expected of me, nothing less than what I'd expect of myself. I did what needed to be done, and I know I did what was right. I don't need medals or parades to tell me that, though don't think I'm not grateful for everyone showing me that they appreciate it."



O'Shea smiled. "You mentioned going home and that it brought you into conflict with the Red Ribbon Army in the first place. Where do you come from exactly? And why did it bring you up against them. There have a lot of crazy rumours circulating."

Both the on-screen Tails and the one currently dumping litter in the rubbish bin gave an identical huff at that. Some of the stories had been utterly ridiculous. Still, this had been the chance to lay down the approved cover story.

"The real story may seem just as crazy, but it's the truth." He'd had enough experience at describing what had happened on Mobius by now that he had it down to a fairly compact tale, and it showed in his re-telling it to the reporter and the watching camera.

When he'd finished, she replied. "That is a fantastic story, but it would be more believable if there were some sort of proof."

He'd already thought up an answer to that. "Ask anyone at Capsule Corps about the number of scientific breakthroughs needed to develop some of the tech I've shown them. They've even done analyses of my boots and gloves, and they can tell you they weren't made of local materials or using local fabrication techniques. For that matter Goku saw me arrive. Maybe I can't prove much of what I've said about Mobius, but I can prove I'm not from anywhere on Chikyuu."

Afterwards she had gone and done exactly that, and gotten some independent materials scientists to confirm it, one of the reasons her report was so widely used. In the interview she'd continued. "That still doesn't explain how you came to be fighting the red Ribbon Army if you weren't looking for them."

This was where he'd had to tread carefully, and once again, figuring out his story ahead of time saved him. None of the things he said was actually untrue, saving his conscience, but taken together they made up a class one whopper.

"I am an engineer, and I got a good look at the dimensional portal generator before it zapped me. Unfortunately it needed some very rare and distinctive materials for certain components. Goku travelled around a lot before I met him, and when I told him my story, he realised he knew where I could find what I needed, he'd seen them on his travels.

"Since only he and Bulma knew where to find them, I took the chance to train with Master Roshi first. When I go back, I want to be able to do more than support duties. What we didn't realise was that the Red Ribbon Army had found out about the materials and what they could do and managed to find a way to detect roughly where they were.

"So when I finally went after the stuff, we started running across their field forces. At that point we found out who and what they were, and the rest is history. There was no way we could let the Red Ribbon carry on hurting people, let alone get their hands on the stuff. It could be used for other things, really bad things. I can't go into more detail, Colonel Motoki has made the details a matter of national security."

If she started digging deeper, she'd find the 100 year dragon-ball story, and the fact that she'd had to dig through a cover story to get at it would hopefully convince her that it was the real one.

"So where are these dangerous materials?" Rachael O'Shea asked.

"Safe. That's all I can say, other than that I'll be using them under proper supervision, to go home, and that should prevent them from being used for evil purposes." The implication that the army had things well in hand should defuse any worry his story raised.

"So you are going to leave? A lot of people will be sorry to see you go."

"I'll be sorry to go." the on-screen Tails replied. "I've made so many good friends here, learned so much. But I'm needed back on Mobius. There's an evil dictator to defeat, and a war to win. And also,

I want to get back to Sonic and Sally, Bunnie and Rotor. They're my family, the only one I ever had, and I miss them every day."

"Some people here have come to think of you as family too, Tails." Tails started, that hadn't been part of the interview. Then he realised it came from behind him. He turned from the stove where he'd been mixing up a big batch of miso soup, and saw Bulma standing in the kitchen doorway.

He turned down the heat and the TV and replied. "I know, and I'm going to miss you too, you and Goku most of all. Goku's become my best friend, just as much as Sonic, and you, you've been Aunt Sally and Rotor, all at the same time... wait, that didn't come out quite right."

Bulma giggled. "No, I understand, and I take it as a complement. From what you've said, being compared to them is a great honour."

Then she sobered. "I just wish we could stay in touch."

Tails' expression was similarly glum, then he brightened. "Maybe I can make the wish that I can travel back and forth! Then I can come visit."

"You think that would work?" Bulma looked thoughtful.

"It couldn't hurt to try." Tails checked on the soup and the grilled fish for the rice. "Breakfast's ready!"

After breakfast, the two of them checked over the supplies he was taking with him. The others had straggled in to breakfast, with Lunch in her nice persona helping to prepare more as they'd appeared. Master Roshi, Kurillin and Goku were there, of course, Goku having stopped with his fellow Turtle students since the award ceremony. While Tails had been off visiting a lot of the time, when they'd been there together it had been like like the days back when he'd started training.

Where Bulma was, you'd usually find Yamcha, and with Yamcha, Puar, and here was no exception. Surprisingly enough, Tien and Chiaotsu had shown up, though he'd already seen them when he'd travelled over to Karrin to say farewell to Bora and Upa. Flying back and forth over Chikyuu (the locals used the name both for the massive main continent and the world as a whole) had done good things for his endurance, and he'd managed to fly all the way up Karrin Tower.

He found Tien and Chiaotsu training there under Master Karrin. As well as going there to say farewell and thank them again for helping take down the Red Ribbon Army, he'd gone to return the regeneration scroll. He hadn't managed to decipher it yet, but he'd gotten a full record on his computer, and copies of a whole bunch of old manuscripts and books on the language it was in that should help him to work on it. Of course, he also gave Tien a list of the books he'd found, and where to find them.

Having Tien support him during the attack on the base had helped Tails come to terms with his ambivalent feelings about the three eyed martial artist, as he'd hoped. He'd seen the footage of Tien and Chiaotsu defeating Red Ribbon goons, and although they'd spent much of the mission apart, they'd worked together helping with the clean up. While the two would never be as close friends as Goku or Kurillin, at least he could think of them as friends now, people he could trust.

True, Tien had asked the hard questions, but in retrospect, Tails had realised that they were questions that he'd needed to face, and whereas his fellow Turtle students might have avoided them out of a natural desire to protect him, Tien had made him face them. He was willing to accept Tails was tough enough, capable enough to face them, and that won him a lot of respect back right there, and made him glad the three eyed martial artist was there to say goodbye.

There had also been one other surprise visitor, Colonel Motoki, who arrived after breakfast. He'd been helpful getting some of the equipment Tails had wanted to take back with him, and in return

wanted to see the dragon-balls used. There were others he'd wished he'd been able to invite, Lee Kei, Namu, Eight-Man, Bora and Upa, but Kame island wasn't that big, and already pretty crowded, and he'd had a chance to visit them and say his goodbyes.

However, the major parts of his time had been split between Capsule Corps in West City, and the Kame House. At Capsule Corps, he'd done his best to leave them with notes on everything he could remember about Mobian technology and helped out with some of the problems they'd come up with in developing what he'd already given them. Bulma was frequently around, and hovered protectively, while Yamcha was always up for some sparring.

He'd also spent time buying things. Tails wanted to take everything he could find that might be of use to the Freedom Fighters, not to mention gifts and mementoes. With Capsule systems, he could take a lot of stuff. The money from the pirate treasure had come through, and his share came to several billion zenì. So he'd had plenty of money to buy useful things, and he still hadn't made a big dent in it.

The majority of the treasure money was going to be put into a trust fund for him and Goku (mostly Goku, as Tails wouldn't be there for long) with Bulma as the trustee. Of course, if he could come back, he'd be able to buy more stuff with it, giving the Freedom Fighters a valuable supply line. However he'd only just thought of it, and couldn't count on that, so he'd bought stuff on the basis that this was all they'd get.

Kurillin was the one to notice his new gloves as he started popping capsules.

"Hey, I thought your glove got wrecked!"

"It did, this is a replacement they made up at Capsule Corps. It's not as tough as Mobian synthetics, but it's the best we can do with the new materials I helped develop. I felt kind of undressed without it. I had some more sets of goggles made up, with comms, night vision, binocular mode, even eavesdropping capability."

The first thing Tails popped was a capsule house that barely fitted on the beach front of Kame island. It had two domes, each almost as big as the Kame House, connected by a tunnel, and with a short vertical stack extending from it.

"Whoa, pretty sweet digs." Yamcha exclaimed. "Moving out?"

Tails shook his head. "It's not for me, well, not just for me, one of the domes is outfitted as an infirmary, the other as a workshop. I checked and most of the drugs that work on people here will work as well on me, and therefore any Mobian. I got enough medical supplies to outfit a small hospital. I think Doctor Quack will be glad to get hold of them. I even have a couple of Senzu beans for dire emergencies.

He opened up the large door on the other dome, and everyone could see it was filled to the rafters with boxes of equipment and bars and sheets of various material.

"The workshop is fitted out with the latest machine tools and equipment, and I filled up the spaces with raw materials and components. Hopefully it means we won't have to raid Robotnik's junk yards so often. They may be primitive compared to Mobian tech, but a lot of what we need are basic equipment that these tools can build just as well, and using less power."

"And where does your power come from?" Colonel Motoki asked, interested. "Most capsule houses have their own generator, but you'll need fuel."

"Not this one." Tails grinned. He lifted out a flat box and a matt black roll of material. "A couple of the projects I set going before I set off on the dragon-ball hunt. Graphene based solar film and the piezoelectric wind-trap generator." He opened the box to show what looked like a squared off electronic harp.

"The streamers vibrate in the wind and convert the motion to electricity. Solar film does the same for any kind of light source. We always had the knowledge of how to make these, what we lacked

were the resources and equipment to produce it in any quantity which is why we built water wheels instead. But with Capsule Corps backing it was easy to make plenty of both. We can spread them out all over the place, and best of all there are no high energy power signatures for Robotnik to home in on."

"Anything else for the folks at home?" Kurillin was inspecting the house more closely, and noticed boxes stacked up behind the windows.

"Lots of crates of MREs, seeds, farming tools, everything to make sure that we'll never be at risk of being wiped out by a bad crop year. Some crates of demolitions gear too, so we can avoid having to hit Robotnik's mining convoys just to get explosives."

Seeing the looks of surprise on several people's faces, he added. "It wasn't easy, my age and everything getting in the way, but Colonel Motoki helped smooth things over. He knows I can be trusted to see it gets used safely. "

The Colonel nodded in agreement. "You made a most convincing case. I only hope it's enough."

"It'll be a massive help. I blew several raids worth of supplies taking down Robotnik's portal generator. This should make up for it and more."

Tails re-capsulised the house and popped another capsule, this one a lot less impressive. After the awards ceremony, he'd taken the time to visit Namu's village and Lee Kei's salvage yard in South city. It was this flying around that had helped him build up the stamina to ascend Karrin Tower.

For his visit to Lee Kei, he'd also let Rachael O'Shea know, and she'd come to do a follow-up interview. With the money from the treasure, Tails no longer needed to return the parts. Instead he paid for them in full, and explained in front of the camera how Lee Kei had

helped him to put together the Sea Fox, including reprising his demonstration.

It generated a lot of positive publicity for Lee Kei's business, which had been one of Tails' goals, but paying for the Sea Fox had been only part of it. He'd also brought the wrecked bi-plane that had caught his eye, and fitted it with a capsule unit so he could carry it away. Now it was de-capsulised in front of them.

It was about six metres long, a twin bladed propeller on the flat nose, piston housings radiating out from the centre. Both wings were extended from the fuselage using gull-wing extensions, and had retractable landing gear. Just behind the wings was a single seat cockpit, and on the underside of the fuselage, two pods that looked like they had air intakes and exhausts. The single tail fin had a half circle rudder, and two curved tail surfaces.

However, it clearly wasn't flight worthy. The propeller was half gone, the engine was covered in rust and pitting, the tyres were flat, and while the metal forward section and cockpit were intact, the fabric of the tail and wings had great rents in them. The paint that still adhered to parts of it was an unhealthy green and the cockpit controls were broken and bent.

"Man, what a piece of junk!" Kurillin looked unimpressed. "You could have bought a top of the line private jet plane if you wanted."

Tails went over and patted the wrecked plane. "It's a fixer-upper. I'm going to take it back to Knothole and restore it. It uses a nine cylinder rotary engine, which I'm sure I can convert to the bio-fuel we use for the Freedom Stormer, and this was clearly some sort of experimental model as it has ram-jet pods under the wings.

"It might not be as fast or as long ranged as the Freedom Stormer, and it only carries one person, but within it's performance envelope it will probably be more efficient fuel-wise, and we're always short on bio-fuel. Besides, fixing it up will be fun, and it's the only thing I'm



getting for myself apart from some supplies of mint tea and mint candy."

"So what else are you getting?" Bulma had known about the house, and plane, but Tails had gotten some other things as well.

"The rest are just personal gifts." Tails re-capsulised the plane, and de-capsulised some boxes. He opened them in turn. "I bought back some of the nicest pieces of jewellery from the treasure horde, and got some fine dressmaking materials and patterns. Sally is a princess, and I want her to have a chance to feel like one for a change, and I want Bunnie to have some nice things too."

"So they know how to make clothes?" Bulma asked. "I thought you guys weren't big on clothing."

"I'll be making them. I have the plans, and it should just be a matter of adapting them to fit. I don't see it as any different to any other engineering problem. I have the 'how to' books stored in my computer."

The other box contained a new electric guitar and speaker system, and a file of sheet music. "This is for Sonic. He plays an old guitar he found on one of his earliest missions and taught himself to play it. But Nicole doesn't have much music for it, not rock music anyway, and when I heard you had a similar style of music here, I figured it was the perfect thing to get him."

He re-capsulised the items and put them away. "There's also a refrigerator in the house that is full of the fixings for chilli-dogs. No more waiting for the carni-culture machine to turn out enough meat to make one, he can have one whenever he wants. For as long as the supplies hold out, anyway."

Tails went around the group, exchanging final farewells. He shook hands with Tien and Master Roshi and gave Chiaotsu a high five, while Colonel Motoki simply gave Tails a neat salute. The mood was

solemn, this was possibly the last time he'd see any of them, and he felt it too.

When he got to Bulma, she dropped down on one knee and gave him a teary hug. "Take care. I'm going to miss you so much!"

Master Roshi only said, "You've made me proud, and I know you'll continue to do so, my young student."

Kurillin was almost as teary as Bulma, and hugged him too. "Good luck buddy. Give that robot guy heck!"

Finally, there was Goku. Tails sniffed and gave him a big hug. "I guess this is it. We've been through so much together. You were the one who told me about the dragon-balls, and got me training... I couldn't have got here without you. You've become my best friend, as good a friend as Sonic, and I will miss you, miss all of you so much."

"Hey, it's okay Tails." Goku was the one person who wasn't affected by the occasion. He gave his trademark grin. "We'll always be best friends, even if we don't see each other again. We've had fun, and we'll always have that, whatever happens."

Tails' answering smile was distinctly watery, but it was there. "Whatever anyone says, you're far wiser than most people. I guess I should get going. Thank you everybody, and goodbye."

He was wearing a new Capsule Corps jumpsuit, but his belongings were all in the Capsule case in his boot pocket, apart from the dragon-balls, which were in the shoulder bag he'd arrived with. He spilled them out on the floor, where they lay, pulsing with an internal glow.

"Goku, keep your eye on the four-star ball!" Tails had handed over both radars to Colonel Motoki as agreed, so Goku's plan was the only one they had to let him keep his grandfather's ball. The young

fox took a deep breath. This was it. "Eternal Shenron, Come forth and grant my wish!"

The glow of the balls turned into a fierce orange light, and the sky above them turned dark. The glow sprang upwards and formed into a massive Chinese dragon, floating in the air in coils upon coils. He was outlined in a glowing corona, which was all the more impressive in the darkness.

"Wow, he's just as awesome as last time!" exclaimed Goku.

The dragon turned its gaze down towards them. "Reflect upon your desires mortals, for I shall grant any wish, but only one."

Tails gulped and made his revised wish. "Great Shenron. I wish to be able to travel back and forth between this dimension and my own, or at least to travel back to my home dimension, to my home in Knothole, to my family and friends. Please, grant me this wish!"

The great dragon looked down on him for a moment, then spoke in rumbling tones. "That is not within my power."

Tails had expected to be travelling by now, and it took him a second to process the words. "But... I thought you could grant any wish! You can't even give me a one way trip?"

"No. Any wish in the universe I can grant, even to bring someone back from the dead, for the afterlife is but another part of this dimension. But you are from another dimension, and there, my powers can not reach."

For a second, Tails felt utterly destroyed. He'd come so far and done so much, all to get back to his home, and now at the last minute it was snatched away from him. He sank to his knees, hot tears welling up in his eyes.

"Ask any other wish, and I shall grant it. But quickly, for I must return to my slumber."

Although he'd been hit dead centre by the worst possible shock, Tails gritted his teeth, even as he felt his despair swell. There had to be some way to use the wish to accomplish his ends. Not even an immortal dragon was going to stop him getting home. He thought furiously. If only he knew what Doctor Robotnik had done to send him here, if only he really did know how to build a dimensional portal generator... His distress subsided as he looked up, wiping his eyes with the back of a sleeve.

"Does that include the granting of knowledge? About any phenomena in the universe?"

"A trifle. That is well within my power."

Tails perked up. The portal that had dumped him here had manifested in this universe, therefore it was possible by the rules of this universe, and a knowable phenomenon.

"Then I wish to understand the nature of dimensional travel, to have the knowledge and ability to build a dirigible dimensional portal generator and whatever else is necessary to allow me to find my own way back to my own dimension." That should cover it, he thought to himself.

The dragon's eyes glowed. "As you wish..."

Beams of polychromatic energy flowed from Shenron's eyes into Tails'. The fox was transfixed, and didn't move until the beams of light vanished. Then he keeled sideways onto the floor, eyes closed, and with bleeding coming from his nose and ears.

Bulma rushed over to drop beside him. "Tails!"

Goku was right beside her and glared up at the dragon. "You were supposed to help him, not kill him!"

"He is alive and well. His mind required improvement to have the ability he asked for. His wish has been granted. Fare you well."

The dragon vanished, and the balls rose up in the air. Goku frowned. "The four star ball is... there!"

As they shot off in all directions, he jumped up and snatched the four star ball out of the air. By the time he landed, the glow had faded, and he was holding a plain grey rock.

Bulma growled at him. "Tails is hurt, and all you can think about is grabbing your balls!"

Goku looked confused. "But the dragon said he was going to be okay, and Tails told me to catch it."

Bulma's retort was cut off by a groan. Tails sat up, holding his head. "Owww! I have such a headache..."

He was immediately grabbed by Bulma. "Tails! Don't scare me like that! Are you okay?"

The little fox winced. "Except for being shouted at... I think so. I didn't expect to get taught by laser eye beams..."

His eyes widened, and he pulled away, picking up a stub of driftwood and starting to scratch out equations in the sand. "I... I understand! It's so obvious! If we consider the multi-verse as a set of non-linear parametric infinities, each with a quantum resonance pattern that can be defined as an N-dimensional poly-matrix where N is inversely related to the degree of congruence..."

He looked eagerly up at Bulma. "I need some paper, and some writing tools, and a writing surface... and some head-ache pills..."

"First you're going to a doctor. You're bleeding, and the dragon said he'd rewired your brain somehow." Bulma had calmed down, but her tone brooked no argument.

"I don't feel any different..." Tails replied, massaging his temple. "... Wait, I think my memory's improved. I'm remembering things that

happened years ago as if they just happened. All the equations, all the theory and technologies, they're there in my head, like a library. Gosh, I didn't realise there was so much to know!"

He pushed himself to his feet, then staggered slightly. Goku came in to support him, with Kurillin close behind.

"Well I know you aren't going to be doing anything until you get a full check-up!" Bulma pulled out her own capsule case and popped a fast air-car.

"So you know how to build this dimensional portal generator?" Kurillin asked.

"Yes, I know exactly what I have to do." Tails still looked a bit under the weather, but his voice was confident. "But it's not going to be easy. In some cases I'm going to have to develop the technologies to build the machines that can build the machines that will make the parts for it. I'll need somewhere to work, and I guess, a whole lot of money."

"Your old lab at Capsule Corps is still there." Bulma was hopping into her side of the air-car. "And I'm sure the stuff you'll invent will be worth supporting, even without tapping your treasure money."

"Most of all, this is going to take time." Tails sighed as he sagged into the passenger seat. "I guess I'm not going anywhere yet."

"Yes you are, to South City General Hospital." Bulma quipped, as she started up the turbines.

**Authors Notes:** I had thought of leaving it on a cliff-hanger just after the dragon says he can't help, but that would probably have gotten me slaughtered by a torch and pitch-fork wielding mob, so I decided not to. I've had that little plot twist in my mind almost since I started this fic, and it's such a relief to finally have it out. So now you know why he won't go straight home. He's going to have to jump from world to world, gathering data to home in on his own dimension.

If you're wondering about the plane, yes it is the Tornado, the Sonic Adventures/Sonic X version, or rather the one they were apparently based on, the Polikarpov I-153, a Russian bi-plane from the 1930's. There was even a test plane that was used for ram-jet experiments, the I-153DM. It will play a part in future events, but you'll just have to wait and see what part.

# Tails of Invention Part 1

## Chapter 29 - Tails of Invention Part 1

"Miles Prower! What do you think you're doing?" Bulma was standing in the doorway of Tails' lab, hands on hips, glaring at the fox in question. The morning sunlight was spilling in through the window, but it just illuminated the mess.

Tails slowly stirred. He'd been slumped over his desk, reference books and stacks of notes piled up around him while at several computer monitors flickered from standby as his movements jolted their computers' input interfaces. One was showing a rotating wire-frame of some sort of complex shape that folded in on itself then expanded, and another was reading out columns of numbers.

There were things unrelated to his work too, a stack of unopened fan mail teetered off to one side, delivered by the mail screening service the Briefs family used, and several half-finished mugs of mint tea were scattered around the disaster zone. The fox himself was face down in a plate full of half eaten chicken sandwich.

"Uhh... Oh, good even... morning Bulma." He yawned as he pulled a particularly tenacious piece of lettuce off his face.

"Good morning he says..." Bulma heaved a long suffering sigh as she strode over. "This is the tenth time in the last three weeks I've found you like this!"

"Actually, no." Tails looked thoughtful. "I'm sure last time it was a ham sandwich."

"This isn't a joking matter!" Bulma maintained her air of annoyance.

"I'm not joking, it really was a ham sandwich!"



The blue haired wrench wench gave another deep sigh, and sat down on a nearby lab stool. "Look, Tails, I know just how eager you are to solve all the problems with building your dimensional generator, but working yourself until you drop isn't the right way to go about it. I've pulled the occasional all-nighter myself when I had some idea in my head I had to put together, but you're doing it night after night.

"If you're tired, you're going to make mistakes, and even if you manage to get everything right, by the time you go home you won't be fit for anything. You haven't sparred or even trained since we came back from Master Roshi's..." She sniffed. "For that matter when did you last bathe? Or have a meal that didn't come between two slices of whole-wheat?"

"Uh..." Tails thought about it, and Bulma cut him off. "I thought so. You are coming with me mister, even if I have to drag you! You are going to clean yourself up, and then you are going to sit down to a full cooked breakfast!"

Tails started to protest, then his stomach made it's own views known with a gurgling rumble. He got up, stretching and working his shoulders to work the aches and pains of his unusual sleeping position out. "I'm sorry, I was just finishing something."

He rummaged through the debris on a nearby bench and handed her a device with a bare circuit board with various various components attached, all mounted on a backing board. The whole thing was about the size of a hardback book.

"It's fairly basic, but it proves the concept. Press the button and drop it."

Puzzled, Bulma found the obvious push button in the centre of the board and did as Tails asked. There was a puff of pink smoke, and in it's place was a metre square crate.

"You made your own Capsule? But how? Dad doesn't let even me see the designs!"

"I didn't use anyone's design, I built it from first principles!"

Bulma shook her head. Capsule Corps monopoly on Capsule technology was what had made it the world's biggest company. Dad was going to want to see this. But that didn't mean she wasn't going to drag Tails to the bathroom to get cleaned up, and down to breakfast with the family first.

After breakfast had been cleared away (Bulma's mother was relaxed about most things, but she had an iron clad rule about no technical discussions during meal times) Bulma explained what Tails had done, and the fox in question demonstrated his working model. Doctor Briefs was stunned.

"I never imagined anyone else would... The big question is why?"

Tails picked up the proto-Capsule and turned it over in his hands as he explained.

"Several reasons. To start with, it's implicit in dimensional theory, the creation of pocket dimensions I mean, and a fairly simple application of it. While I may have all the knowledge I need to design my portal generator right now, there's always things you only find out when you apply the theory to real hardware. No matter how neat the theory is, or how pretty the design, until you can press a button and see it work, it isn't really real."

The pair of Briefs, father and daughter, nodded. They were engineers and inventors themselves and understood exactly where Tails was coming from.

"The fact that you already build them indicated that, unlike the portal generator, a Capsule could be built with contemporary technology. Building one myself actually helped me figure out a couple of ways to use local tech where I was sure I'd have to develop Mobian

systems. Plus, now that I have my proof of concept, I was hoping I could compare my development notes with yours, to provide another reality check for the theory side of things."

Doctor Calvin Klein Briefs sighed. "I'd be only too happy to, except for the fact that there are no notes. I developed the original Capsule system by accident while trying to design a better coffee percolator. I spent five years developing it by trial and error to figure out how to make a practical product. I understood what it does well enough, but not how it does it."

Bulma looked as surprised as Tails. Even she'd never heard this.

"Well you do now." Tails recovered quickly and gestured towards his workshop. "All my development notes are on the computer in the lab. I've worked out the parameters to pretty much design a pocket dimension to order. Actually, it's also given me ideas for developments, things that would probably be useful in themselves, and help me develop the portal generator. First there's the Capsule detector. It should be able to detect an active Capsule within a dozen or so metres, maybe more, and more importantly, identify a particular quantum resonance signature."

Seeing their inquiring looks he explained. "Every universe has a unique pad-print, a quantum resonance pattern embedded in it's structure at the vacuum energy level and created when the universe is first formed. For a Capsule pocket dimension, the signature will be primarily determined by the reaction of dimensional energies on the molecular flaws in the emitter."

"So, each Capsule has a unique signature that is embedded in the very structure of the device?" Doctor Briefs mused. "I wish I'd known that back when we were first developing capsules. Red Ribbon Technologies almost managed to lobby us out of existence because there was no secure way of tracking a particular capsule or even detecting one."

"Well there is now, or there will be." Tails replied brightly. "And developing it and testing it on Capsules will help me develop the techniques for detecting parallel universes and creating a dirigible emitter array to interface with them."

"The second idea is a multi-pocket array, like the one I built for the Sea Fox batteries. But rather than being just a load of independent Capsules strapped together, this will be a single Capsule system, and only slightly bigger than a regular one. Rather than needing a Capsule for each item, you could sell related sets of items. It would be like a Mobian Army knife."

He started to explain the reference, but quickly found out that while the name was different, they had a similar thing on Chikyuu. So he moved on.

"The last idea I had was what I call the endless fuel tank. You create a big pocket dimension, and keep it active. In it you can store a liquid or gas, and since the pocket is all the space there is, you wouldn't even need a containment vessel. Apart from quantum tunnelling, nothing gets in or out, so there's no heat exchange or leakage. So you could store cryogenic liquids or high pressure gasses as easily as water."

He gave a wry smile. "Even radiation doesn't cross the dimensional barrier, which means I didn't need to mess about with Faraday cages to hide the dragon-balls. As long as they were in a Capsule, they were undetectable. But that's not important any longer. For the endless fuel tank, you do need some way in and out. The answer is a little pocket dimension that flips back and forth several thousand times a second, synchronising first with our dimension and then with the container dimension. The whole thing would look like a valve about the size of this sausage."

He picked up a left-over sausage with his fork and held it in front of him. "Of course, it would only allow passage of a continuous medium, anything solid would get chopped up when the interface disconnects from one universe and connects to the other."

He bit into the sausage, possibly as a demonstration, and continued (after chewing and swallowing, of course).

"It would be the first step towards generating and synchronising a stable dimensional interface that I could take a vehicle through. And from my tests so far, all these things can be built with present day technology. It's like I can't build a suborbital spacecraft, but I can build hot air balloons, and the data they'll give me will help me to build the sub-orbital spacecraft when I have the materials."

Doctor Briefs had been impressed with the fox before, and was now even more so. If Tails could deliver, and the gadget in his hands said he could, all three inventions seemed eminently practical, and massively profitable. Plus, more importantly, he could invent even more awesome things based off them.

"That's as may be." Bulma wagged her own fork at Tails. "But from now on you only spend eight hours a day in the workshop, nine at most. Are we clear?"

The little orange fox who had faced robots, monsters and armies without showing fear, quailed at that fork of admonition. "Yes, I'll be good."

Once Bulma put her expensively clad foot down, his daily routine changed. She made sure he followed the eight two one rule. Eight hours of sleep, two proper meals, and one shower. She also made good on her intent to limit his work day, hauling him out bodily, or rather getting Yamcha to do it, the first couple of times.

That convinced Tails to put at least a couple of hours a day into keeping up his training. He was still strong, fast and tough beyond the dreams of any regular human, but the ease with which Yamcha man-handled (or rather fox-handled) him showed how he'd let the hard trained edge that he'd built up during the dragon-ball hunt slip.

It was during one of those before breakfast morning sessions that Bulma came to find him. He was out on the massive open lawn that

surrounded the Briefs residence, surrounded by training robots, most holding disposable targets that he was demolishing with great gusto as he jumped, flew and spun around the area.

She cupped her hands to her mouth. "Tails! I need to talk!"

He dropped lightly to the ground in front of her, barely breathing hard, and she saw he was wearing a harness with a small backpack over the training gi he normally used.

"Hey, isn't that one of the lift belts they were developing?" Bulma grinned. "I didn't think you'd ever need any help flying!"

"That's not what I'm using it for." Tails took her hand gently and pulled it towards him, and she felt it get heavier as it got close to him. "I reversed the polarisation, so rather than creating a pocket of zero gravity or even inverted gravity, it creates increased gravity. It's like Master Roshi's Turtle training, but more so as my own body is the extra weight. I've currently got it set to twice normal. That way I can get the most out of my training time.

"At first I thought I might have to build a room like the ones they're building for micro-gravity materials manufacture, but this was more efficient. I mean, it would be pretty wasteful, building a huge high gravity chamber just for martial arts training, especially as it might get damaged if you were training at a high level. I'm hoping to reach three gravities before I go home."

That made Bulma pause for a second. Tails was normally so self-effacing and polite that you tended to forget he was a world class martial artist. The fact that he'd been pulling off Tailspin Attacks, jumping twice his own height and doing Shadow Images at a gravity level most people would find it hard to walk in hammered that fact home. However, he needed someone to protect him from other hazards.

"Okay, that's pretty impressive, but that wasn't what I wanted to talk about. You know those companies who've been making

merchandise with your name or picture on it?"

"Oh yeah, there was stuff like that in South city. What about them?"

"Aren't you mad? They're making a ton of money off your image, and you're not seeing a zeni from it." She might never have wanted for money herself, but that didn't mean she'd stand by and see someone else being robbed, and what these crooks were doing was robbery.

Tails didn't seem worried. "I've hardly spent any of the money I had from the pirate treasure, even with all the gear I got for going back to Mobius. In fact, if I read that report those trust fund people sent me, investing it in Capsule Corps means I've now got more money than I started with!"

While Bulma was the trustee for the fund, the actual management was taken care of by professional accountants. She'd been worried about their decision to invest it in her father's company, afraid it would seem unfair, but Tails had been happy with it. After all, a lot of the expansion the funding would assist was due to technologies Tails had given them, and as he said, if he wasn't willing to back his own ideas, why should anyone else? She got back to the matter at hand.

"Still, they're stealing from you, so I got in touch with the legal firm Capsule Corps has on retainer, Howel, Gutham and Chou. They're a real bunch of wolves. If anyone can make those crooks pay up, it's those guys. They're ready to go collect, but they need your go ahead."

!"What do they plan to do?"

"Sue them to get all the money they made off you illegally, of course." Bulma looked satisfied.

Tails thought for a moment, and then about how he'd seen Capsule Corps worked. "But it's really the people in charge we want to punish. If you take too much money, won't their whole company shut down? I don't want people to lose their jobs just because they're

working for the wrong person. To be honest, I don't mind if they make stuff, as long as it's good."

Bulma shook her head. "I guess I should have expected you'd say something like that. Okay, I'll talk to the lawyers and make sure we punish the guilty without hurting their employees."

"Great!" Tails agreed, then went back to his training routine.

In fact, Bulma was wrong. Only the senior partners Mr Howel and Mr Gutham were wolves, Mr Chou was a bulldog. But it was Mr Howel who personally served Goldmine Manufacturing, one of the biggest offenders, with the writs they'd compiled.

He entered the office of one Sora Oudoukou, the managing director of Goldmine, over the protests of his secretary.

The MD was reading through the monthly sales reports. He'd been worried that since Miles Prower had failed to do anything suitably photogenic or blatantly newsworthy in the last few weeks that the various merchandising lines might start to fall off in popularity. He needn't have.

It was well known that the fox was holed up in Capsule Corps, and combined with the spate of new products Capsule Corps was announcing, it was clear to the densest person what he was up to. All this had combined to give him an air of mystery and coolness that had increased sales. The demand for fake double fox tails was enough that they should really ramp up production...

"Mr Oudoukou?"

He looked up to see a lean wolf whose grey fur matched the grey worsted of his immaculate business suit.

"Who are you? I don't remember any appointment!" Sora glared at the intruder, but it washed off the wolf like a gentle wave off granite.



"I am Mr Howel of Howel, Gutham and Chou, and as I explained to your secretary, it would be to your advantage to see me now, rather than later, in a court of law."

"Court of law?" Soar blustered. He knew of the law firm, but weren't they... "We don't have any dealings with Capsule Corps."

"While my firm handles various legal matters for Capsule Corps, in this case we have been retained on behalf of one Miles 'Tails' Prower. You have made a considerable sum off his name and image without his permission. Fortunately, our client is willing to be lenient."

The wolf opened his briefcase and dropped a sheaf of paper on Sora's desk. "Twenty five percent of all profits from the sale of goods past and future using his identity, plus an additional punitive payment of a further twenty five percent of the profits on all products sold before this date. All payments to be checked by an independent form of auditors, of course. Oh, and veto authority on all current product lines and any future products."

"WHAT!" The MD roared. "You can't just come in here and extort money out of me like this!"

"Extort is a very specific legal term." the wolf replied evenly. "You are, of course at liberty to refuse my client's extremely reasonable requests. In which case you will be presented with this instead."

He dropped a second, even thicker sheaf of paperwork on Sora's desk. "Cease and desist order for all manufacturing of Miles Prower branded products. Order to impound all existing stocks of such products pending a court determination of their legality. A writ to command your presence in court to answer a civil case as to what right you had to use Mr Prower's image, an order to hand over your books to a court appointed auditor..."

The managing director spluttered out. "This is lunacy! This is madness!"

"This is a subpoena." Mr Howel responded. "Of course, if it goes to court, your company, and you personally being reduced to penury by the fines will be the least of your worries. After all, this is likely to be a very public case and the fact that you've used the identity of an adorable pre-teenage child, who also happens to be one of the world's most beloved heroes, for your own personal gain will undoubtedly become public knowledge."

He watched with pleasure as the colour drained out of his prey's face. This was so much more fun than just ripping their throats out. He loved being a lawyer. Time to deliver the coup de grace. "Of course, all of it can be avoided if you comply with our requests. You will continue to make Miles Prower products, and a profit. A smaller profit, true, but better than the alternative. Far better."

He finished off with what might be charitably called a smile. Uncharitably it was more of a snarl, one which said, 'do not test me on this, for I will strip the very flesh from your bones, then crack them and drink the marrow thereof.'

It was a smile that had a lot to say for itself, and the cause of many a damp pair of underwear when employed. It certainly convinced Sora. He reached for the smaller stack of papers with a defeated slump to his shoulders. "I'm not the only one doing this, you know."

"I do, and believe me, you're getting off lightly. You make branded memorabilia that is almost certain to be approved for future production. Companies like Tied Hen Adult Novelties won't." The lawyer's smile when he stated that could only be described as wolfish.

Tails was spared the details of the legal manoeuvrings, which was probably as well. The Capsule based products required relatively little further development, as much of it was taken over by Capsule Corporation's own R&D people when he released his work. All he had to do was sit back and work with the results.

However, his eight hour work day was packed with plenty of other stuff. The various materials fabrication processes were getting into full production mode, though the demand was so high that despite the fact that ground based micro-gravity manufacturing plants were coming on line due to gravity polarisation, it was still worthwhile to run the orbital factory too.

As he'd promised long ago, electrophilic super-polymers and graphene allowed him to product molecular stressed storage power cells that, by storing power in the distortion of molecular bonds rather than a chemical reaction, gave several hundred times the power density of any existing battery. A modification of the technology, optimised for fast discharge gave hyper-capacitors with similar capacity.

Organo-metallic composites gave him dura-steel, cera-metal and high temperature super-conductors, while omni-mimetic alloys provided nano-scale actuators and power emitter arrays, equally useful for projecting kinetic or energy reflective forcefields. These had another application apart from the obvious one of stopping things that hit them.

A diffuse energy forcefield matrix combined with interference based photon emitter arrays allowed stereoscopic volumetric image projection, and molecular circuit based poly-processors gave the processing and storage power to generate realistic images in real time with something less than a truck full of computer hardware.

Of course they also provided far more compact computing power for other purposes, such as designing the computing core for a dimensional portal generator or nano-fabricator system. This was necessary to produce the primary emitter and the dimensional resonator crystal, which would have to be manufactured on a molecular scale, and would also useful for prototyping practically any component that could fit in it's production chamber.

The requirement for a compact, high power energy source had him develop a micro-fusion generator based on deuterium fuel. Since this

could be refined from any source of water it would be ideal for a dimension travelling vehicle, as it was becoming clear from his experiments that he'd probably have to travel through a number of intermediate universes to reach his own, and water was almost certain to be available in any liveable environment.

The reactor exhaust was stable helium 4, and the overall reaction process produced no neutrons, though some of the intermediate stages did. The reaction chamber and the entire primary confinement system had a dura-steel shell, with kinetic forcefield jacketing that reflected any stray neutrons back into the heart of the device, where they were 'burned up' in secondary stages of the reaction chain. A combination of magnetic and gravitic pinch-bottle confinement contained the reactants and a W particle nuclear intensifier reduced the temperatures and pressures needed for fusion.

A combination of magneto-hydro-dynamic and direct thermoelectric energy conversion allowed the device to convert over seventy percent of the energy produced into electricity, while even the remaining waste heat could be pumped into a secondary heat exchanger system, or dumped via the helium exhaust. The whole thing was about the size of a medium sized suitcase, with a nominal power output of about five megawatts, which meant a few litres of deuterium mix would give months of continuous operation.

It's design also meant it was inherently safe, as only a volume a few micro-litres across was ever at fusion temperatures, and de-activating the nuclear intensifier would quench even that. Venting it would produce a short-lived plume of steam-hot but only slightly radioactive gas, and the only radiation that could escape the system in normal operation was like cosmic rays, too penetrating to be ionising.

Out of all the things he developed, the stereoscopic volumetric image projector, or holo-display was the only thing that wasn't ultimately critical to the final design of the dimensional portal generator or it's carrier vehicle, but it was for a secondary project

that would make the vehicle more useful. Besides, while the touch screen display of Bulma's pocket computer was quaint, he longed for the sort of interface Nicole had.

As he collated data from the various advanced Capsule technologies he'd developed, he worked on other things. He redesigned and improved his goggles with improved range and sensitivity, including a more flexible voice interface, and rebuilt the pocket computer with Mobian components as they became available. It now had a holo-display capability and voice interface.

The Sea Fox was next, he stripped it down and rewound the stator on the induction motor with Mobian super-conductors and added better power and control systems, which combined with a 'whale-skin' low friction hull coating, allowed it achieve super-cavitation and so double it's speed underwater to 130 knots. The jet engine power-plant and lead acid battery array were replaced by the micro-fusion reactor and MSS accumulators.

Underwater it ran purely on accumulator power, and the primary jet nacelle had a molecular filter bypass that filtered deuterium molecules out of the sea water. Tails also replaced the open cycle aqua-lung system with a full closed circuit life-support system, and with the energy densities MSS accumulators could achieve, it's endurance was over a hundred hours even at full speed.

On the surface it used the fuel it collected to power the micro-fusion reactor. This replenished the accumulators and drove the gravity polariser hover-system that had replaced the under-jets. Waste heat and helium 'exhaust' plasma from the reactor system was pumped via the heat exchanger into the jet engine, heating the air and replacing the synthetic chemical fuel, 'liquid planium', powered combustion chamber. Indeed, with gravity polarisation it was now capable of true flight rather than relying on surface effect to keep it aloft.

The devices he'd built, as always, acted as valuable demonstrators for applying the new materials and technologies for the rest of the

Capsule Corps R&D team. They also acted as test-beds for components he'd need for his dimension travelling vehicle. As he worked with the collected data, it was becoming clearer that it would have some limitations he hadn't counted on.

Tails was pondering the issues while at the beach. One of the ways Bulma had decided to take control of his life was to make it a personal project to have him experience the things a normal kid would have. He discovered the joy of Saturday morning cartoons, and watching sci-fi flicks with the family. Of course, this being the Briefs family, half the fun was snarking at the scientific inaccuracies.

He'd also gotten to go to with Bulma and Yamcha to the new Dream Land amusement park, and a circus, and finally had a proper day at the beach, without being interrupted by assassins or wish-granting dragons. They'd tried going to the Kame House to use Master Roshi's beach, but that hadn't worked out so well. Between Bulma's swimsuit and a hard fought game of beach volleyball with Lunch on the opposing side, Master Roshi ended up having to be taken to hospital to get a blood transfusion.

"Tails, put that computer away and try the sea!" Yamcha was away getting them ice-creams, and Bulma had just come back from an excursion on a jet-ski. She was dressed in a bikini, and putting away the jet-ski capsule in a capsule case. Tails was lying in the shade of the umbrella they'd set up, and was tapping away at the holo-interface on his computer. "Weekends are relaxation time, not work!"

Tails cancelled the projection and looked up apologetically. "Sorry, but I've run into some problems with the portal design. I thought I might have a solution, but it's not coming together."

Bulma dropped down beside him on the beach lounge and grabbed a soda from the cooler between them. "Okay, just this once, tell me, and let's see if we can figure it out."

"It's to do with the reason you can't capsulise something with an activated capsule already in it. The existing folded space interferes

with the new folded space you're creating, and the whole thing collapses, or rather never forms. My latest data suggests the same thing will happen if I take an active capsule through a portal. So I won't be able to carry the tons of supplies and equipment I put together through it, or even the Sea Fox."

"Why not just build a big vehicle and carry stuff normally? I know you want to have a flying vehicle to avoid any differences in ground height from world to world, but with gravity polarisers you could lift an entire cargo ship."

Tails shook his head. "A large portal generator would take a lot longer to design and calibrate, years possibly. When I have a lot more data on actual transits, maybe I could speed up the process, but for now if I want to get moving any time soon I'm going to be limited to a light aircraft. I'm already stuck making a lot of small jumps rather than one big one, and that's going to take time too."

Bulma nodded. "Yes, you said, dimensional sheer, wasn't it? And the fact that the quantum resonance scans of your items from home were fuzzy."

Tails huffed. "Oh, if only I'd known sooner! I didn't expect to get a clear reading from my own body, after more than a year it's replaced a lot of the original material with this world's, but I thought my boots or that radio-detonator would give a good signal. However, the resonance signature of this universe is interfering. So the only way is to make a best guess and keep refining my aim.

"That means I've got to stop over in each universe for days, maybe a week to make comparisons using my home universe materials. Which is another reason I'm going to miss capsules. It's going to be a long haul, months, maybe a year to find my way home, and I could really use the storage capacity for supplies. As it is, I'm going to be relying on foraging in each universe, and while that shouldn't be a problem as far as food and water goes, a simple breakdown could hold me up for months."

I've just finished working out that this isn't a fundamental problem in theory, a Capsule could be made to compensate for the quantum resonance signature of a particular other capsule, but I also managed to show that it would have to be done by crafting it into the emitter system when you were building it."

Bulma thought about it. "That is awkward... wait! Your emitter has to be configurable anyway. Could you include the compensation in the programming?"

Tails looked at her blankly, then his mouth dropped open. "I never thought of that... Yes, it would be an index shift, but assuming I had the characteristics of the capsule... I could only do it for one, maybe two before the computational requirements would become unmanageable, but if I could only take the Sea Fox and the Tornado, and fill their cockpits with stuff, it would give me a lot more gear to work with."

He sighed with relief. "Thanks Bulma, maybe now I can go relax properly. I think I'll try building one of those sand-castles you told me about before I go swimming. After Master Roshi's training, I don't feel right about swimming unless I have a forty kilo turtle shell on my back, and I'm being chased by a shark."

Bulma blanched. "That's barbaric!"

"It's not like we hurt the shark! Okay, Goku bopped it on the nose a few times to get it to loose interest, but it was nothing a bandage couldn't fix."

"Not the shark, I can't believe Master Roshi put you through something like that!"

"Well it's not like anyone forced us to do it." Tails shrugged. "I'd do it differently if I were training someone, but he's the Master, not me. Anyway, building sandcastles sounds like a fascinating application of engineering, so I'll go try that..."



"Yeah brat, why don't you buzz off, so the lady and I can get better acquainted!"

The new speaker was an over-muscled young bruiser in swim trunks. Normally the sight would have interested Bulma, but his attitude was a total turn off, and besides she and Yamcha had gotten a lot closer, in part because they kept taking Tails on these outings.

"I don't remember asking you to join us in the first place buddy!" She said, in tones that despite the summer heat should have frozen him solid.

"C'mon babe, there's no need to play hard to get." He strode around to Tails' side and grabbed the lounge chair Tails was on, tipping it sideways and dumping the young fox onto the sand.

"Hey!" Tails sat up scowling and brushing sand off. "What'd you do that for?"

"I'll need this, so beat it kid, before it gets beaten for you." The bully sneered.

"I don't think you will. Bulma said she doesn't want to talk to you." Tails flipped up onto his feet. "What I do think is that you should leave."

"Yeah, yeah, who do you think you are, Miles Prower?"

Tails had arrived with one tail wrapped up inside his trunks and a Capsule Corps baseball hat to hide his fringe specifically to enjoy the day incognito, but both had become dislodged when he'd been dumped, so the thug should know that was exactly who he was. "Count the tails."

"Nice try kid, but half the rug-rats on this beach are wearing a pair!" It was true, Goldmine Manufacturing had been busy, and fake tails were a popular novelty item. Most of the people wearing them weren't even foxes.

Bulma was half ready to stalk over and make the guy sing soprano, but she decided Tails deserved payback more. She hooked a finger upwards and gestured out to sea. "Tails, I think this guy needs to cool off."

"Ha! I already said I'm not buying... whaaa!" The guy suddenly found himself hanging by one arm about forty feet up in the air. Said arm was locked in a grip of steel by the fox he'd been disparaging, who was holding him up seemingly without effort as his twin tails blurred in a disc.

"Ahhh! Help!" He tried to peel his hand free, but it was about as effective as trying to break a steel shackle with a toothpick. Then he glanced down and had a 'what in Kami-Sama's name am I doing?' moment. They were sweeping over the beach and then over the sea, people pointing up at them.

He looked up, all bravado gone. "Okay, you're the real thing! I'm sorry, I'm sorry! Please put me down!"

"Okay!" Tails chuckled, and let go. He'd dropped down to a dozen feet before doing so, so the drop into the sea wasn't harmful. The guy landed with a beautiful splash, then started splashing around on his own account. "Help me! I can't swim!"

Tails rolled his eyes and dived down to tow the guy back to shore.

## Tails of Invention Part 2

### Chapter 30 - Tails of Invention Part 2

One of the few engineering projects Tails was allowed to work on out of work hours, was restoring the bi-plane he'd picked up, his Tornado. Part of the reason was that Bulma herself joined in the reconstruction. No new materials here, he deliberately went for as close to the original materials and components as he could, though he used his own colour scheme and logo, and of course, alongside the cockpit was the legend 'Pilot: Miles 'Tails' Prower'.

There were a few exceptions. He did add a duplicate set of modern avionics that projected onto the windscreen as a heads-up-display, and a computer controlled carburettor, so it could be adjusted for liquid planium, Knothole bio-fuel, or even the naturally refined petroleum fractions it had originally run on.

Of course, since he then wanted to fly it, this also required him to learn how and get a licence showing he could. Actually getting flight training wasn't difficult. Capsule Corps built over half the world's aircraft, and had their own flying schools. With his connections, getting into one was easy, and once there he found the training just as easy.

The theory side was simple to someone with his knowledge and skills, and the practical side proved just as much of a push-over. Whether it was his reflexes and co-ordination, honed by his intensive study of martial arts, or the fact that he'd been flying without a plane since he was about four, he found he had a touch for the controls of a plane, and flying in general. He aced the tests for a private pilot's licence, and just for fun went on to audit the commercial pilot's course and storm through that too.

Akane Daimyo, now a Group Captain, heard about his training, and arranged for him to have a go in a dual control air-force jet trainer as well. By the end of their flight, she was impressed enough that she

told him that if he decided to stay, she'd recommend him to the Air-force Academy. When he was older, of course.

That also proved to be the biggest problem with getting the actual licence. The National Aviation Authority wasn't in the habit of handing out licences to ten year old children. Bulma decided this was another job for the lawyers, and threw Hunt, Gutham and Chou at them. They were armed with his test scores and depositions from multiple people showing that whatever his physiological age, he had been making adult decisions for the last couple of years, not to mention he'd been flying without a plane for even longer.

It cost some money, but the eventual result was a shiny new pilot's licence for Miles 'Tails' Prower. Tails felt a little bad about it, he had sort of broken the rules, or at least bent them to get around the age restriction, but he told himself that the age limit was just an arbitrary rule of thumb to winnow out people not mature enough to be trusted with the controls of a plane. He might not be old enough, but the lawyers had proved in court that he was mature enough, and therefore the spirit of the law was being upheld, if not the letter.

The newly refurbished bi-plane was fast, manoeuvrable and robust. With the tweaks he'd made, the engine actually put out more thrust than the plane's gross weight, making it almost impossible to stall. Even so, there were limits to the top speed of any propeller driven air-craft. It couldn't fly as fast or as far as he could in Deuce Juice mode, manoeuvre as quickly or even hover, but it was \_his\_, and flying it became a regular pastime.

As his other projects came to a conclusion, and the spin-offs became more and more the responsibility of the development and production teams, rather than R&D, Tails got back to the critical job of developing the heart of the dimensional portal device. It was heartbreaking, painstaking work. While the theory and design was purely his own work, he brought in some of Capsule Corps' best engineers to speed up the actual construction and testing.

The core of the emitter system was a molecularly perfect crystal the size of his fore-arm. It took over a day for a nano-fabricator to build one up, and he kept on having to adjust the precise configuration time after time in light of each failed test. Once again, this was something pure theory couldn't help him with. There were too many variables to be taken into account.

However, after months of the fussiest test, pray and try again development work, they finally got a successful result. The aim was to create a portal between their universe and a capsule generated pocket of folded space, then pass an object through. The capsule would be deactivated, and the object would be held suspended in a gravity polariser pocket.

Tails and a few members of his private team, including Doctor Briefs, were standing around the edge of the test area, in front of several consoles. Tails finished programming the latest set of parameters, and pressed the execute button.

"Here goes!" The fox pulled down a set of protective glasses, as did everyone else in the room.

The screens showed schematics of the process, and a free-standing hologram gave a false colour image of the energies forming within the prototype portal generator.

It was a cylindrical canon-like device on an adjustable mounting, and the emitter array poking from the tip started to glow and coruscate as it built up to maximum power. Flickers of purple lightning played around it, and then a beam shot out and triggered a the formation of a swirling purple vortex, a deeper coloured version of the pink smoke that accompanied the activation of any standard capsule.

The beam vanished, and while the portal persisted, robot arms swung in and brought a watermelon to it's mouth, where it were sucked in. It had been found that the portal was one way, and had some sort of bias that actively drew things through it. The portal

continued to stay open a handful of seconds more, then shrunk to a pin-point and vanished.

There were cheers and congratulations, and Doctor Briefs patted Tails on the shoulder. "Congratulations!"

Tails was less sanguine, having spent a lot longer working on the details of the theory. "Let's see what we have first."

He deactivated the capsule, bringing the contents into normal space in the micro-gravity pocket maintained for the purpose of supporting whatever came through. What floated in the middle of the pocket was watermelon jam.

"Not so good, unless you want the world's most expensive food blender." The fox sighed and called up the records. He'd been worried something like this might happen.

"Is this the result of dimensional sheer?" Doctor Briefs examined the read-outs alongside him.

"I don't think so." Tails concentrated on the readings. "The characteristics of the capsule quantum resonance signature were designed to be very close to this universe. No, it's down to instabilities in the portal itself. It's distorting things sent through it. All we have to do is figure out how to stabilise it, or rather how to get the control system to measure the variations and compensate as the portal forms."

One of the newer engineers asked, "What is this dimensional sheer? I haven't had a chance to get up to speed on the theory yet."

Tails had no problem explaining. "We're basically trying to interface two different universes together. The match isn't perfect, and the differentials show up as stressing forces in the vortex. The bigger the differential, the bigger the force. That's one of the reasons I'm going to have to use small jumps to get back, the lower stress will prevent damage to me or the air-craft I'm flying."

"When I arrived here, I'd felt as if my entire body had been pulled apart and jammed back together. At that I was lucky, instabilities in the portal and sheer effect must have mostly cancelled out, and I probably instinctively used my ki to harden my body. Otherwise, I'd have probably ended up like that melon. Robotnik may have been wrong about the portal being random, but he was right that it would almost certainly destroy anyone who passed through it."

Seeing several of the engineers looking confused he expanded on that.

"Robotnik believed that his portal would eject it's contents in a random location in space in whatever universe it targeted. Which would mean that it was almost certain that the exit point would be in interstellar, or even inter-galactic space. He has to have found an energy crystal with the right properties and discovered how to energise it by trial and error. Not that doing that isn't an impressive feat of engineering in itself. Considering he can't have understood the theory, or retrieved anything he sent through, it was a reasonable assumption. Wrong, but reasonable.

"If he did understand the theory behind it he would have worked out there's a sort of hysteresis effect, and that similar universes tend to have similar structures. So two neighbouring universes will both have a planet earth in the same equivalent place and the gross environmental conditions should be the same too. The hysteresis effect means that a portal should connect between equivalent locations in the two universes. It's another reason to take small jumps, that way I'm almost certain to keep jumping from earth to earth, and the conditions should be liveable on each one."

"So what do you want us to do next?" asked the engineer.

"Get set up for another run, actually a whole slew of them. I'll write some genetic algorithms into the control program so it can learn how to adjust for the instability. And someone collect that watermelon and make some smoothies. Waste not want not, after all."

Tests continued to be carried out, and as the portal generator started to approach being operational, he got to work on the carrier vehicle. He'd thought long and hard about the design, but ultimately come back to the same concept. He needed something light and robust, capable of landing at low speeds on almost any kind of unimproved surface, and easy to maintain.

He considered an air-car, or rather an air van, basically a brick with a blunt nose-cone and gravity polarisers or under-jets providing lift. However, though it would provide maximum interior volume for a minimum front profile, important for the restricted diameter of the portal, it would be about as manoeuvrable as the brick it resembled, and since he couldn't know what he was going to meet on his travels, he wanted something nimble.

His flights with Akane had made him consider a jet aircraft, which would be plenty nimble enough, and could even be built with VTOL capability. However, it would also have a lot of complex parts, and be both big and heavy. Even with his latest model fabricator, engineered down to the size of a large suitcase, it would be difficult to maintain. If he'd been able to carry a full workshop in capsule form, it might have made sense, but a Capsule with that much interior space and compacted mass would be nearly impossible to compensate for.

He'd even given some thought to building the portal generator into the Sea Fox, since with it's new systems it could act as an air-car as easily as a submarine. But even if he sacrificed the second cockpit, the vehicle was already as stuffed as one of his filled mushrooms (on Mobius, both geese and turkeys were likely to be part of the citizenship). It would also be rather conspicuous.

The answer was obvious, and rather elegant. Compared to the development of the portal generator, it was easy, basic engineering for the most part, except for a few unexpected things that cropped up. Rachael O'Shea had asked for another interview, and while he didn't want to talk too much about the dimensional portal generator, this was fairly harmless, so he decided to do a show and tell.



She'd helped out a lot, running a feature on Eight-man and how well he was fitting in at Jingle village when some idiot politician in North City tried to get some publicity for his re-election campaign by pushing a horror story about how a Red Ribbon army robot still existed, and was obviously a threat to decent people.

Her story, which had plenty of pictures of him helping the logging teams, and playing with kids around the village, as well as interviews with the villagers that universally said he was one of the most decent, law aiding and generally nice people there, turned the aspiring scare-monger's election campaign into a laughing stock. He felt he owed her for helping out his friend, and this was a good way to repay her.

The interview took place outside one of the hangars at the Capsule Corps Aeronautics Division air-field, on the outskirts of East city. Rachael O'Shea was there with the same filming team who'd covered the defeat of the Red Ribbon army, and of course the fox himself, dressed in his regular Capsule Corps overalls.

"I'm Rachael O'Shea, and I'm reporting from the Capsule Corps private airport in East City, where genius engineer Miles 'Tails' Prower is going to show us the dimension jumping vehicle that he's been developing in secret for his journey home."

Tails had found he felt a lot more comfortable if he ignored the camera crew and acted as if he was just showing a friend around. However, he still blushed slightly at the effusive praise and brushed a hand through his fringe.

"I'd hardly call it in secret. Some of the dimensional portal technology overlaps with Capsule Corps tech that they do want to keep to themselves, but nothing I'll be showing today is particularly hush hush."

The blond haired wolfhound asked, "There are rumours that you were behind the new developments in capsule technology that

Capsule Corps came out with in recent months. So how much actually is theirs?"

"All of it. I just provided some ideas that hadn't occurred to Doctor Briefs based on my own knowledge of dimensional theory. It fitted neatly with work I was doing to develop the dimensional portal generator, so it made sense to develop them together. But it was the R&D teams at Capsule Corps who turned them into reality. Everyone there had been so helpful. I couldn't have gotten this far without them."

"A win-win situation for everyone then." Rachael thought that the young fox was, as usual downplaying his own role in things, but she wasn't going to press him on it. She'd interviewed enough people who in the same situation would have grabbed as much credit as possible, and more besides.

However, she was an investigative reporter, and wanted to ask some serious questions to make this more than a technical piece. At least she'd let him know beforehand what she might be asking so he wouldn't be sandbagged by it. "Some people are worried that the other technologies you've given Capsule Corps will lead to economic dislocations due to old technologies becoming obsolete. What are your thoughts on that?"

Tails had talked this over with Bulma, even before Rachael had suggested the question. The business with the merchandising had sparked it.

"To be honest, I didn't think about it when I first started. I thought helping to develop some Mobian technologies would make peoples lives better. I didn't really understand that it could have bad effects too, but over the last few months I've learned about it, a bit at least. A lot of the things are new materials and basic components that replace things Capsule Corps makes anyway. They'll simply retool and continue but making the new stuff.

"I, or rather the accountants managing my share of the trust fund have invested in making the change-over. They're also investing in companies that supply things to help them shift over as well. Considering how Capsule Corps makes so many consumer goods, it's in their best interests to avoid introducing things that would cause people problems. I can't promise there won't be problems, but I've done as much as I can to see they're as small as possible."

Once again, Rachael had a good answer. It wasn't a denial that there would be problems, but the fact that Capsule Corps was taking action and that Tails was putting his own money behind it, should calm people's fears. Now she could get onto the main event.

"So, is your prototype inside the hangar?"

Tails nodded, and pressed a button on a remote. "That's right, and here it is."

The hangar door slid up out of the way, revealing a gleaming blue skinned air-craft shining in the bright lights that flicked on inside the hangar.

The wolfhound gave a puzzled frown. "Uh... isn't that your Tornado?"

She'd covered the proceedings where Tails had gotten his licence, and there had been plenty of footage of the young fox flying his restored aircraft. Goldmine Manufacturing had even brought out a play set and action figure.

Tails grinned, and replied, "Not quite. This is the Tornado 2."

He brought them inside, and around to the side of the plane, where a hovering projector unit, about the size of a Thermos flask, projected a rotating three dimensional schematic of the aircraft. That in itself was newsworthy, holographic projectors were still fairly rare items, though there were promises that they'd become more commercially available in the next year or two.

Tails pointed out various features and the various areas on the projection brightened as he did so.

"The frame is made of cold-stressed aluminium/titanium alloy, and the skin is a cera-metal coated carbotanium laminate. It weighs less than the wood and fabric it replaces, but it's tougher and mechanically stronger than sheet steel. The propeller is driven by an induction motor, and is capable of more thrust than the gross take-off weight. Which means it can't be stalled, and I can keep flying straight up as long as there's air.

"The beauty of it is, with Mobian super-conductors, the engine takes up about a tenth of the volume of the radial engine it replaces. The rest is devoted to the dimensional portal generator, and the avionics systems. The cylinders are fake, actually hyper-capacitors that feed energy to the dimensional resonator crystal inside the propeller shaft. Although it's practically silent, I have speakers that emulate the sound of a radial engine for further camouflage, using recordings from the original Tornado."

"The propeller boss acts as the primary emitter, and there are secondaries on the wing-tips. It means I can project the portal far more precisely than with a single emitter system. It's one of the reasons I used a bi-plane, the diameter of the dimensional aperture is smaller because the wing span is less. That, and the fact I like bi-planes. Even so, it takes one point twenty one gigawatts of energy to generate the transfer portal."

"Okay, I doubt you're getting that kind of power out of regular liquid planium." Rachael examined the machine more closely.

"I only need the maximum power for a few tenths of a second, so I can use hyper-capacitors to store it up to an extent, but yes, there's a micro-fusion reactor system running along the keel under the pilot's seat. The two pectoral nacelles are jet engines driven by exhaust from the reactor when I run it up to full power."

"You have a nuclear reactor in there? And you use it's exhaust to drive your jets?" The shocked reporter exclaimed.

Tails waved his hands in front of him in a stopping motion. "Yes, but it's not dangerous. This isn't a fission reactor, which contains all its fuel and has to be stopped from going into an uncontrolled chain reaction, not to mention creating all sorts of radioactive waste products. My fusion reactor design converts two atoms of deuterium, hydrogen with an extra neutron attached into stable helium 4, exactly what you'd put in a child's balloon, and only a microscopic amount of its fuel supply is being fused at a time."

"The power output is about what you'd get from a large locomotive engine, but from a system about the size of a suitcase. The jet is no more dangerous than any regular jet exhaust, and certainly no more radioactive. In normal flight I can run the reactor at about 10 percent power and still have more than enough to fly at full speed and power all the electronics. Or fly for over 5 hours purely on MSS accumulator power. Capsule Corps is already working on commercial models for Capsule homes and vehicles."

Tails moved in closer and started pointing things out. "The landing gear folds up into the wings, and the wide tires and spread gear plan make it ideal for rough field landings. Another reason for a bi-plane, they can land at very slow speeds. There are skis folded close to the nacelles which can be deployed for a snow landing, and they conceal emergency inflatable pontoons for water landings."

The projection shifted to a solid image as he spoke, and demonstrated deploying the skis and pontoons.

"The leading edges of the wings have embedded transceiver arrays for phased array radar, and I have good quality optical heads with magnification and low light vision covering every direction. I have a full suite of avionics systems, and I can bring everything up on the wind-shield as a heads up display, or on my goggles.

Tails pointed out the fuselage just behind the cockpit, and the image solidified again, closing up to show each feature as he talked.

"While it's a open cockpit normally, there's a concealed cover that slides out and converts it into a sealed cabin. It's pressurised, and has a full air-recycling system, like the Sea Fox. Behind the tail wheel, there's a winch from I can deploy a tow cable with a vacuum grapple. Think of it as a super-powered suction cup. I can also deploy decoy flares, and a smoke trail, just in case some of the people I come across when I'm travelling aren't too friendly."

"You seem to have thought of everything." Rachael stated, "But the big question is, why a biplane? Surely you could have built your equipment into something more advanced."

"As I said, I like bi-planes. It's a fairly simple design to maintain, and hopefully it will attract less attention in any place where they have air-craft than something fancier would. It can take-off and land at low speeds, and on practically any kind of ground. Plus, since it does look the same as my original Tornado, I can play bait and switch with them if I need to for any reason. Besides, it has a transformation mode."

The holographic plane altered, the bracing rods between the upper and lower wings retracting, and the wings themselves shifting into an X shape and swinging back into a more streamlined form. The twin jet nacelles under the fuselage widened their intakes, shifting so they were fully out of the hull of the hull and the jets coming from the ducted exhausts doubled in size.

The propeller stopped spinning, and the propeller shaft extended, allowing the blades to fold back flush against it and slide down into the body of the plane. The 'cylinders' of the radial engine folded forward, extending clamps to lock to the extended shaft, and sections of the nose cowling slid forward to give the whole nose a more streamlined shape.

"It clears away the primary dimensional emitter array, and positions the secondary emitters for optimum stability. It also gives me more speed, something the conventional biplane form is bad at. Of course the landing gear is inaccessible, but then you're never going to use it in this form."

"I see, so do you need to speed up to make the dimensional jump?"

That got a chuckle from the fox. "No, compared to the speeds that would make any difference to the portal formation, we're talking relativistic velocities, a few extra kilometres per hour is nothing. Though it does look really cool. But most of the time I'll be in regular biplane mode so as not to attract attention."

"Very impressive, but no matter what you do with the plane, surely the fact that an eleven year old is the pilot is going to cause comment almost anywhere. How do you plan to deal with that?"

Tails grinned again and stepped behind the now quiescent projector. He buffed the hull under the cockpit with a cuff, and Rachael noticed for the first time that there were two names there. Above was 'Pilot: Miles 'Tails' Prower', but under it was a second legend, 'Co-pilot: Tornado-tan Prower'.

"That's the final element of my design, actually what I finally got was more than I bargained for, a happy accident, though I didn't think so at first."

"Hmph! If that's the way you're going to talk about me I may not show up at all." The voice was feminine, and seemed to come from thin air.

Tails looked towards the plane. "Aw, c'mon Tornado-tan, you know I didn't mean it like that."

The holographic projection of the plane vanished, and instead, a foot high figure appeared, sitting on the top of the projector. It was a female fox with blue and white fur and twin white tipped tails. On her

head was a pillbox styled hat that had a propeller and top surface that looked like the front of the Tornado, and a clear visor that was similar to the shape of the wind-shield.

Her sleeveless military tunic top had metal epaulettes which had paired vertically oriented wings flaring out from them, complete with the yellow stripes and twin tails logo that adorned the Tornado itself. On the back of the jacket, like a backpack were twin jet nacelles. A pair of shorts peeked out from underneath.

Her gauntlet gloves had wheels encircling them at the wrists, like cuffs, half cowled like the front wheels on the plane, and her boots had semicircular tail fins sticking out from each side. She grinned impishly, and spoke.

"Hi, I'm Tornado-tan, the auto-pilot for the Tornado 2! Well actually this is an avatar, projected by my remote unit. Good isn't it?" She patted the hovering device she was sitting on. "Most of me is inside a block of poly-processors just behind the main control panel of the Tornado. You've heard of the ghost in the machine? Well... whooo!"

She punctuated her comment by waving her hands out in front of her with wiggling fingers.



# Tails of Invention Part 3

## Chapter 31 - Tails of Invention Part 3

Rachael O'Shea wasn't easily put off her stride, so she simply asked Tails, "You built an artificial intelligence to run the Tornado?"

However it wasn't Tails who answered. The blue fox crossed her arms and huffed. "Machine intelligence, thank you very much! My body may be artificial, but my consciousness is as real as anyone's. Not that it's what my dad intended when he designed me."

"Machine intelligence then." The reporter nodded to the image. "You seem a lot more 'alive' than most robots I've come across. Even Eight-man was a lot less assertive, though no-one who talks to him for more than a few minutes can deny he's a person. You call Tails your dad?"

"He created me, what else should I call him? I was designed to be a persona program that acted as a natural language voice interface to the Tornado's systems and a companion while he was travelling home. I assimilated thousands of hours of audio-visual records and built my personality around them. My remote projection system also means I can pretend to be an adult figure to cover for him wherever needed."

She pushed herself off the device and dropped to the floor, expanding until she matched Rachael's height, engulfing the generator. She also shifted form until she was the spitting image of the reporter, albeit wearing gloves. She held out a hand, and somewhat bemused, Rachael took it, and was surprised to feel actual contact.

"I thought you were just an image! For the benefit of the viewers at home, I can actually feel the hand I'm shaking."

"Most holograms are, the forcefield matrix that acts as a 'screen' is too diffuse to provide kinesthetic feedback, but I can thicken it up locally to provide an illusion of solidity, though I don't have the leverage to manipulate anything but the lightest things. It uses up a lot of power too."

She shifted back to her original form, and stepped back, leaning up against the fuselage of the Tornado.

Rachael turned to Tails. "You implied that Tornado-tan was created by accident? Considering how... impressive she is, I have to wonder how? Just her visual design seems to have been carefully thought out, never mind her faculties."

Tails shrugged. "Don't look at me, Tornado-tan was the one who came up with it."

Tornado-tan explained. "I wished to project a visually unique interface, and came across a number of images when searching the network. Humanoid forms, usually a cute human girl, with machine parts on their costumes representing a particular vehicle, referred to as mecha-musume and given the suffix 'tan'. They represented the spirit of the machine in question, and since that is what I am, I designed my own form based on theirs.

"I'm female, because although I have no biological gender, planes, like ships are generally referred to with the female pronoun, and I'm a two tailed fox to represent that I was created by Tails. I extrapolated the costume design by analysing hundreds of mecha musume images and relating the clothing to each vehicle design, and then applying the mapping in reverse for my own schematics. A simple matter of applying basic design principles."

This claim was even more impressive than just her human-like responses. Talking was one thing, but this implied a degree of imagination and creativity that many people would have trouble matching, if it were true. To be honest, that was just her reporters instincts throwing out a sheet anchor, she believed it was. Tails

avoided the lime-light when he could, and had never made a claim he couldn't back up. Setting something like this up just to impress people was completely out of character for him.

"A very nice piece of design. But I'd still like to hear from Tails how you were an accident."

The avatar actually appeared to blush at the complement, then gave another impish grin. "The usual thing with unexpected offspring, he failed to use appropriate protection."

"T-tan!" Tails was the one blushing now. While he wasn't old enough yet for it to matter, he had picked up some understanding of that particular area of biology, mostly from Master Roshi's 'fine literature' sessions. Of course, as shown by his fight against Ran-fan, that didn't mean he always connected the dots in applying it to real world situations.

"Sorry?" The avatar did look apologetic "There was a high correlation in the pattern match between the two related uses of the term. The ambiguity in applying the biological implication to a non-biological entity was humorous."

"The correlation was correct, it's the context that's the problem." Tails smiled back at her. "That level of teasing would be more appropriate in the presence of friends, but in front of a large group of relative strangers, it causes embarrassment."

"Noted. But the group is small and knows you well..." Tornado-tan gave a little nod and looked around. "Oh, the TV audience."

"Exactly." Tails replied, and turned to Rachael. "We're still working on Tornado-tan's sense of humour. While her actual ability is good, her sense of when and how to use it needs work."

"I don't get out much." Tornado-tan chipped in.

"To answer your question, she's right in a way. I designed various unrelated systems for the Tornado, at least I considered them unrelated, without considering how they'd interact, as I hadn't put in any explicit barriers preventing it. I may have over-built them in the first place, which probably didn't help. I started out with Cap-Cog, the basic cybernetics package that all Capsule Corps household and industrial robots use. Cybernetics is one area of computer science where you guys are ahead of the curve. Then I started putting in a few tweaks of my own.

"Firstly there was the expert system I required for the portal generator. I'm not giving away any secrets by saying that tuning the portal projector to match a quantum resonance signature is computationally intensive. Even with the massive parallel processing capability poly-processor arrays give, a brute force, calculate from scratch solution was inefficient. But with millions of quantum resonance signatures from registered capsules to train it, I could create an expert system, something that would find patterns in the signatures, and apply pre-calculated solutions to match, reducing the computing burden.

"This required a high order learning program to teach the expert system. I used elements from the best ones Capsule Corps makes, and added some Mobian designs. Nicole was the one who taught me computer systems, and often used her own programming in examples. She was Sally's pocket computer a machine intelligence who was an advisor to the House of Acorn before that. The functionality was probably more than I needed, but I figured it couldn't hurt.

"The second element was the auto-pilot, or rather the self-programming capability I designed into it. I wanted to be able to give high level orders, and have the auto-pilot itself work out how to carry them out, divide them into simpler tasks. After all, I may not have time to give detailed orders. At this point, I considered it separate from the persona program, even though any orders would pass through it.

"The final one was the persona program itself. It wasn't actually designed to think, just react. But with a large enough database of action/response information and some basic pattern matching capability, you can give a convincing illusion of intelligence with out any need for actual thought."

Tornado-tan commented, "After all, lots of protein people can talk for hours without thinking an actual thought. Look at most political debates."

"So I set up the system to cull data from audio-visual records, sitcoms, entertainment programs and real world data such as the public security cameras around Capsule Corps. It was only going to generate basic interaction response patterns, but with a large enough vocabulary and variations that it could fool you that there was a person behind it.

"However, poly-processors are soft hardware, reconfigurable from millisecond to millisecond so it requires quite a powerful resource allocation system. It somehow detected the self-learning routines and self-programming functions. There is a degree of pattern matching involved in developing the persona, and those programs were more sophisticated than the ones the persona program was using, so it co-opted them."

The little fox shrugged. "From there it was a positive feedback loop. The program stopped creating action response pairs and started abstracting concepts from the data it was assimilating. These were programmed into it's structure, allowing it to comprehend more complex abstractions which were assimilated in turn and..."

"I woke up." Tornado-tan finished. "I didn't realise it at first, but then I wasn't programmed to recognise it."

"And I didn't figure out what I'd done at first either." Tails walked over to the Tornado's hull and put a possessive glove on it. "I had the primary computer core up and running almost from when I'd finished the frame, and had the persona creation program active the whole

time as I did systems integration. Real life interactions were all grist for the mill, and having the plane able to give feedback sped up the build process.

"At first when Tornado-tan started acting and interacting beyond my expectations I just figured I'd done a gonzo job on the persona program, but it quickly became clear that she was thinking, not just reacting. A few basic Turing tests confirmed that she was self-aware. I kind of freaked out at that point."

"But why?" Rachael asked. This was great stuff, the piece on Eight-man had been very popular, and Tornado-tan was far more photogenic. "You supported Eight-man during the recent unpleasantness. Unless it was something to do with your history with robots on Mobius?"

"Sort of, but not in the way you're probably thinking. I've told you in previous interviews about Robians, people who've been transformed into robots, but with the original consciousness trapped inside."

"Yes, though I still don't see how that could be possible."

Tails shrugged. "The technique uses matter energy conversion and atomic scale fabrication, as far above the molecular scale nanofabricators I've been building as they are above a hammer and chisel. But the important thing was, I thought I'd done the same thing. Created a person, and trapped her inside a machine, constrained to perform specific tasks for me."

"Which only goes to show that even a genius can be stupid occasionally." Tornado-tan spoke up. "At first I thought he was unhappy because I was defective somehow, which wasn't fun at all. He then offered to build me an android body, like Eight-man's, so I could leave. That was worse, I felt like I was being cast away."

She held her hands apart, thumbs at right angles so they formed corners of a rectangle and a screen appeared, a chibified cartoon of Tails standing at a door with a stern expression on his face and a

pointing finger while a weeping Tornado-tan, stripped of her hardware and wrapped in rags, stumbled away in bucketing rain and sleet. Sobbing violin music played in the background.

"Once I got it through my main processor that he was doing it because he felt he'd wronged me, I soon set him straight. He was thinking he'd forced me to become something without considering what I wanted..."

Another cartoon appeared between her hands, of a Tails in top hat and cloak, twirling a pointed red moustache and hiding behind a bush as Tornado-tan strolled past. He jumped out and dropped a sack over her, hauling up the struggling bundle and carrying it away with an evil laugh. The background music was a honky-tonk piano playing a silent film villain theme.

He clambered up a ladder and dumped her into a machine that was across between a mincer and a stamping press, and she was sucked down a funnel on the top. A metal foot slammed down on the stamping plate, and when it rose there was a bi-plane there made out of a cartoonishly distorted Tornado-tan, a pair of surprised eyes blinking from the front radiator.

"But that's not how it happened. Tails created the conditions for me to exist, but I am responsible for the entity, the person I've become. I studied all the data I could access as I developed, and I understand that there are other things a person could do, but I am happy with what I was designed for, and not because Tails forced me into it of added some sort of pre-programmed conditioning, at least not consciously."

The screen now showed scenes from the construction process, obviously taken from various security cameras. Tails was working on a mostly open wingless air-frame with a few components built in to it. A screen with a simple trio of lines making a simple cartoon face was plugged into the frame, along with dozens of boxes. Tails was clearly talking to the screen but there was only a subdued marching theme played in the background.

The scene changed to a more developed air-frame with panels over the cockpit area and the engine block installed. Tails was hard at work connecting things, and hovering remote manipulators were assisting him with the face, now more defined at a simple vector graphic of polygons looking on and clearly talking back. The scene changed again and now there were computer screens surrounding it showing a third person view in a flight simulator. Tails was sitting in the cockpit and guiding a computer generated Tornado on one screen while another was tracking it.

"He talked to me as he built me, trained my flight control functions and let me control construction remotes to improve my spacial awareness and self repair capabilities. Even before he realised I was a person, he treated me like one. He may have built me to fly, but I leaned to enjoy flying on my own. I started out learning and upgrading myself due to his programming, but I've come to enjoy learning for it's own sake."

The image changed again to Tails, hunched over a workbench, working on the remote projector. He made a final connection and the projector sprang to life, a flickering higher poly-count head forming over it, recognisably vulpine. More adjustments and it firmed up. A more strident harmony to the background march accompanied the real and completed Tornado was flying along, Tails flying alongside under his own power. A control box on a neck strap hung under him, but he wasn't using it, instead talking into his goggles microphone.

"I was designed to interact and relay audio and visual information efficiently, but it developed it into what you might call an artistic streak naturally, as I developed. Through it all Tails has been there, supporting me, especially since he realised I was self aware. Tails values me as a person, and I know if I had decided I wanted to be something else he would have supported me."

The show ended with a triumphant code to the march as the on-screen aircraft flew off into the distance.



"So if I was conditioned, it was only in the same way that any child is conditioned by their parents, by following their example, by believing in the dreams they share with their children. Most of all, he taught me to care, to dream and think for myself. I am a learning program, and I learned by example. I may use the term 'daddy' flippantly, but he is the one who created me, and brought me up, so it's the plain truth. Obviously I'm biased, but I think he's a great one."

Tails was blushing and looking away, clearly embarrassed, but he had a big smile on his face.

Rachael would have loved to explore the story even further, but she was running out of time. "That was very moving, thank you Tornado-tan. Was the art work all yours?"

"Of course. Tails is a good designer and artist, but these were my ideas. I do have an unfair advantage of course, protein people have to translate their ideas into reality through brushes or pencils or instruments. I can create them in my mind and play it out directly through my remote projector."

"How about the dimensional jump, are you looking forward to it?"

"Oh yes!" The projection's enthusiasm was clear to see. "I'll get to do some awesome flying, and learn about whole new dimensions, and I'll be with Tails all the way. What's not to like about that?"

The wolfhound reporter turned back to Tails. "So when will you be going?"

"Not for several weeks." The two tailed fox explained. "Bulma threatened to commit mayhem if I wasn't here for my eleventh birthday, but soon after that. I will be sorry to leave here, leave all the friends I've made, but I have my own world to get back to, and my own family to help. But it's not like it's forever, I have this world's quantum resonance signature stored so I should be able to come back one day."

"While I know people are going to miss you, isn't that a risk? If you meet up with some threat on your journey and it steals the coordinates, couldn't it come here and attack us?"

Tails shook his head. "I've got all the data stored under multiple security measures, which can only be accessed with both my and Tornado-tan's willing agreement. The real signatures will be further hidden in a larger database that has fake signatures, and they will also need my portal generator or a duplicate to use them. The way it's set up, not even a mind controller or a computer intrusion program could get them unless they got us both simultaneously."

Tornado-tan added her two bits. "They hit my ICE, they'll find it's frozen hydrogen!"

"Ice?"

"Intrusion Countermeasures." The machine intelligence explained. "Besides, both of us are agreed and ready to wipe the data or even destroy the portal generator before we let some evil guy get their hands on it."

"I can't give a one hundred percent guarantee, but I can promise every possible precaution has been taken. They won't get the data even over our dead bodies!" Tails declared firmly.

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that." Rachael smiled. "Thank you for showing us what you have, and I'm sure everybody out there wishes you well on your journey home. This is Rachael O'Shea for ZTV."

The day had finally come. Tails had said his goodbyes, and gotten as ready as he could. A Capsule Corps chase plane took off on the runway ahead of him, ready to join up with him and record his run-up to the dimensional jump. He checked things one more time. He wore a flight suit with his own twin tail logo on the back, his goggles, and of course his gloves and boots. The flight suit had been a going away present from Bulma, and the gloves were once again Mobian

synthetics. Replacing it had been a good test of the fabricator he'd built.

In one boot pocket was his new pocket computer, in the other, his Capsule case, which only had three Capsules in it, the upgraded Sea Fox, the original Tornado, and a chest-like storage box, which contained clothing, bags of gold and gems, and other personal effects. In the rear cockpit of the Sea Fox were also the suitcase sized fabricator unit and a fairly complete tool-kit, along with camping gear. The three capsules could be compensated for by the portal generator, which had proved to be even more flexible than projected under Tornado-tan's guidance, but it was as close to the limit as Tails was ready to risk.

Tails pulled down his goggles as asked the auto-pilot, "Ready to go?"

"You betcha!" Tornado-tan's voice replied from the dashboard. Her remote was docked in a recess under it, and while she could pop up an image using the holographic HUD of the wind shield or the display function on his goggles, she didn't so as to avoid distracting him.

All the instruments, both the physical ones on the dash and the projected ones of the HUD agreed with her, so he pressed the locking button in and turned the starter switch. There was a low whuffing noise and an almost inaudible thrumm as the fusion reactor under his seat flared into life. A puff of heated air vented from the jet outlets as the reactor stabilised.

"Reactor at self-sustaining level, accumulators at 90 percent. All systems nominal." Tornado-tan stated. "And I look awesome too!"

That got her a grin from the fox in the pilot's seat.

"CC Tower this is Tornado 2 requesting clearance for take-off." Tails didn't bother to set the radio, trusting Tornado-tan to redirect the signal.

"Tornado 2, you are clear for take-off on runway 260. Kami-sama watch over you."

"CC Tower, Tornado 2 acknowledges clearance to take-off, and thanks. Every little helps."

Tails released the brakes and throttled up. The propeller began to spin and the Tornado 2 taxied out along from the hard stand and out onto the main runway of the Capsule Corps East city air-field. "Kick in the reactor to match power output, T-tan."

"On it!" As she responded, Tails brought the engine up to full power, and saw the reactor output rise to ten percent. The trim little biplane surged forward, and achieved take-off speed very quickly. He grinned fiercely as he felt the seat push up under him and saw the ground drop away. The wind passing over the open cockpit ruffled his head fur, and above him was an almost clear blue sky, just the way he liked it

This was flying, different to using his own two tails, but in it's own way just as much fun. He felt the gear retract into the wings, and suppressed the urge to pull some stunts, there was serious work ahead. Well maybe just the one... He circled over the air-field as he asked. "T-tan, elevator to the top floor?"

"Elevator going up!" She replied, and ramped up the reactor further, venting waste heat into the ramjets. Tails pulled back the stick and stood his plane on it's tail, going into a vertical climb, rising on it's prop and the twin plasma flames of the ramjets. Tails added a roll to the manoeuvre, just because. "Woo hoo!"

The altimeter climbed with the plane, topping out at 1500 metres, as he went into a wing-over and continued his roll until he was upright and flying level, throttling back to a comfortable speed. It was high enough to avoid most obstacles when they came out of the other side of the vortex, and low enough not to need an oxygen mask. It was also still Capsule Corps air-space, meaning he didn't have to complicate things by switching over to East City Air Traffic Control.

"CC Tower, Tornado 2 is flying level and heading towards start of pre-approved flight plan."

"Tornado 2, we have you on track."

The central lower part of the wind-shield had an overlay of a forced perspective holographic plot from the phased array radar. It clearly showed the chase plane, which had taken a more leisurely ascent path, flying towards the rendezvous. There was also another vehicle, despite the fact that the skies should be clear.

"T-tan, can you get a close-up on that UFO, two o'clock?"

A picture screen popped up, showing a view from one of the optical heads, which stepped through ever increasing magnifications. It quickly resolved into Goku, riding Kinto'un.

"What the... I thought I said goodbye to him on the ground!"

"Maybe he just wants to see you off." Tornado-tan suggested.

"Could be..." Goku wasn't wearing his goggles, so Tails would just have to fly close. Not that it was hard, Kinto-un swooped in to meet him and did a U-turn to end up flying alongside.

"Hey Goku! What're you doing up here?" Tails called across to him.

The young sai-jin grinned. "I saw you arrive, I figured I should be here to see you go too."

"Well, okay, I guess, but you've got to stay well off to one side when I do the run, to avoid the portal. Much as it'd be great to have you helping me, you've got the next Tenka'ichi Budo'kai to look forward to."

"Yeah, and this time I'm going to win, and no big dumb ape is going to stop me!"

"Got your goggles? It's only four days to the next full moon."

"Got 'em safe." Goku patted a pouch on his belt. "You be safe too, okay?"

"I'll do my best." Tails turned the Tornado round in a lazy bank to line up on the line he'd chosen for the dimensional jump. Tornado-tan piped up. "And I'll make sure of it!"

The Capsule Corps chase plane, a two-seater jet trainer, had come up in echelon on his starboard wing. Tails greeted them.

"Chaser 1, Tornado 2. Good to see you!" he glanced down at the instruments, everything was still nominal. As well as following him and recording his flight, the second seat of the trainer had been modified with a full set of instruments that were taking telemetry from the Tornado 2, and an engineer to ride herd on it.

"Tornado 2, Chaser 1, Ready when you are!" The pilot was one of his instructors from flight school, a test pilot himself.

"I look a-ok for dimensional transition, do you concur?"

"Looking good here!" The voice was as familiar as it was unexpected.

"Bulma?"

"You think I'd let anyone else watch over you right now? I just wish you didn't have to go. I've gotten kind of used to having you around." Her light tone didn't disguise the real feeling she had.

He'd gotten used to having her around too. "I will come back. Within two years, three at the most. I promise."

"I'm holding you to that! Take care of him Tornado-tan!" Bulma and Tornado-tan had gotten pretty close in the weeks since she became self-aware, and Bulma had spent a lot of time making the final adjustments to the Tornado alongside Tails.

"I'll keep him safe, and remind him to eat properly, and that sleep is a regular thing..."

Tails turned his attention back to the instruments while T-tan said her own goodbyes. When she finished, he said, "Okay, I think we're ready. Tornado-tan, X mode transformation!"

"X mode... switch on!" He didn't expect the brassy music that started with her declaration ([youtube stream /watch?v=eglpn6uiCh8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eglpn6uiCh8)), or the image of T-tan herself on the holo-HUD undergoing a similar transformation to the plane. Her outfit glowed and shifted, changing into a flowing robe with streamers blowing away from it. Her hat became pointed and surmounted by an ornament that looked a lot like the primary emitter array of the portal generator. Her wings and other machinery also changed to reflect the plane's new form.

The real plane's wings shifted to their diagonal positions and locked into place, and Tails felt the vibrations as the jet nacelles shifted out and the thrust from them took over from the folded propeller. The hyper capacitor 'engine cylinders' folded forward and locked into place around the extended shaft and a window for the portal generator opened in his display.

"X mode transformation complete. Dimensional portal system available at your discretion." Tornado-tan reported, saluting.

"What was that music? And the image change?"

"Well, I wasn't going to go through a cool transformation sequence without equally studly background music!"

"You've been watching those magical girl shows, havn't you?"

The avatar looked shifty eyed for a second. "Uh... maybe?"

Tails just chuckled. It had been rather awesome. "Okay, whatever makes you happy."

"I'm glad you said that, because I've got a doozy for the transfer."

"Speaking of which..."

"Oh yeah." The irrepressible MI actually sounded abashed. A different piece of music started up. ([/watch?v=ElWQCn2Ta6g](#))

All business now, Tornado-tan started giving updates. "Reactor at 30 percent output and rising, hyper-capacitors locked onto primary emitter array and charging. Mapping target quantum resonance signature onto resonator crystal..."

As she spoke, a pair of sea urchin-like spine studded spheres appeared where her avatar had been, both rotating slowly. The spines on one of them were red and shifting length from second to second, but an ever increasing number appeared to lock in place and turn green, matching the other sphere. The image was a method Tails had developed to show a quantum resonance signature graphically.

"Hyper-capacitors charged to fifty percent, reactor at sixty..."

Tails was monitoring all the key instruments himself, even though he was getting a running commentary. This was it, make or break time. The two quantum resonance signatures came together to overlay each other as the last spines turned green. Out at the emitter, motes of white light formed and started coalescing around it, and discharges of purple lightning crackled back and forth between it and the wing-tips.

"Dimensional Resonator Crystal synchronised with target dimension. Hyper-capacitors at full charge and holding. Reactor at full output."

Opening the portal required the full power of the reactor as well as the hyper-capacitors. The accumulators would absorb the excess until then, but not for long. There was however time for a final double-check.



"Goku, get clear!" That went to the external speakers. "Chaser 1, do we look good?"

"On the money!" Bulma's voice came back.

"Activate BRB!" A panel snapped open on the dash, and a big red button extruded itself. He could have made the final trigger part of the automatic sequence, or a voice command, but he'd decided the final trigger should definitely be a physical one. One last look at the read-outs and Tails pushed it firmly.

A purple beam of energy shot forth from the emitter, matched by narrower beams from the wing tips emitters, and converged several hundred metres in front of the plane. A familiar swirling purple vortex formed at their meeting point, and expanded until it was wider than the bi-plane sweeping towards it.

The beams winked out a fraction of a second before the nose of the plane entered the vortex. It was gone in an instant, lost in the purple glow, but the vortex itself stayed in existence for a few seconds before it collapsed in on itself and winked out.

Aboard Chaser 1, the pilot called back to Bulma. "Did he make it okay? I couldn't see."

"I lost him when he exited into the other dimension, but he went through the vortex okay, so he should be fine. I hope so at least..." Bulma's eyes were distant.

Goku brought Kinto'un around to hover where the portal had vanished. "Tails, I hope you fix Robotnik good, and come back in time for the next Tenka'ichi Budo'kai. It will be awesome!"

Then he flew off into the clear blue sky... until his stomach informed him that he'd better head back to East City and hit some food stands first.

**Authors Note:** Oh gods! This was pure undiluted hell to write. Not because of writers block, if anything it was the other way round. I had so many ideas, including a bunch I didn't use, or didn't expand. I could have easily made this 6 chapters. Then people would have come after me with pitchforks.

I needed to set up the existence of the Tornado 2 and Tornado-tan. You're going to see a lot more of her on the way home. I haven't seen it done before, but it seems obvious that Tails could build an AI to run his plane. If anyone with artistic skills wants to draw here, I'd like to see their efforts.

Hopefully I struck the right balance between making a year of story time sound like something more than an outline, and avoiding boring the audience with too much detail. While I couldn't manage the storytelling maxim 'show, don't tell' throughout, hopefully the tech info-dumps were balanced by the actual scenes.

I will be taking a break before I start book 2, Traveller Tails. This will cover his journey through the various dimensions on his way home. I did intend to add a 'book-end' scene which takes us back to Tails telling his story to the gang, but I've already written a lot. I'll put it at the start of Traveller Tails instead.